

Dancescapes in Dialogue: An Exploration of Indigenous Australian and Indian Classical Dance Ontologies

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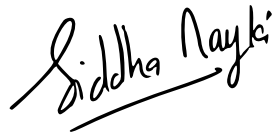
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Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief this is an original work by Sidha Naayaki Pandian and has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any university.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sidha Naayaki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end. Below the signature is a dashed line.

Sidha Naayaki Pandian

Date: 7th June 2019

Acknowledgements

Hari Om

I wish to acknowledge Australia's First Peoples upon whose lands this thesis emerged, and I pay my respects to all elders past and present.

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Abstract

This 'Thesis by Creative Works'¹ investigates the 'same but different' performative ontologies, or ways of being, between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes. The term 'dancescape' refers to the emotional, intellectual, corporeal, spiritual and other ineffable experiences potentially encountered in dance. A multi-source research approach was used to examine numerous 'dancescapes in dialogue'. As such, the thesis comprises both a written dissertation of 44,883 words and a series of videos with a total running time of 39.61 minutes. These integrated elements capture and re-present personal memories and improvisations of the different dancescapes over the period of the thesis project. The visual and written narratives articulate the philosophical and metaphysical ideas that emerged through creative collaborations between the two broad dance cultures; particularly between the South Indian classical dance genre, Bharatanatyam, and Noongar, Warlpiri and Yolŋu dance practices.

Acknowledging the geographic and genetic links between India and Australia and its peoples, this thesis determines significant ontological resonances between present-day expressions of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance. I discuss how these affinities reside in similar movement vocabularies and dance techniques that enable performers and viewers to connect and renew their ties with the sacred and sentient environment. Through Vedic-Hindu performative lenses, I also suggest that Indigenous Australian dance practices deeply resonate with the aspect *Nṛtta* or 'pure dance' as discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—an ancient scripture on dramaturgy, written by Bharatamuni.² My thesis further declares that such traditions of dance continue to engage in ways of *speaking* and *listening* to the earth by striking, digging, sliding and grazing feet upon sentient soil. Thus, the thesis highlights 'dancescapes in dialogue' as a systematic and multi-source method of unearthing, sharing and renewing Indigenous knowledges in this contemporary age.

¹ The policy guidelines for the thesis by creative works is available at: https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_003405.

² The thesis refers to the author Bharata with the added suffix *muni* (sage).

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Glossary A

Bibbulmun—One of the Noongar nations from the southwest of Western Australia.

Bilma—The Yolŋu term for wooden clapping sticks, used for ceremonies that often involve song and dance performances.

Boodjar—The Noongar word for ‘land’ or ‘country’.

Bungul—The Yolŋu term denoting ‘ceremonial dance’.

Derbarl Yerrigan—The Noongar word for the ‘Swan River’ in Perth, Western Australia.

Djuwalpada—The Wägilak creative ancestor, who is metaphysically linked to Njilipidji, southeast Arnhem Land, Australia.

Ganbulapula—The Yolŋu creative ancestor, who is metaphysically linked to Gulkula, northeast Arnhem Land, Australia.

Gulkula—A remote site located northeast of Arnhem Land; also home to the annual Garma Festival celebrations hosted by the Gumatj nation.

Jampijimpa—One of the eight male skin/kinship names given in Warlpiri society.

Jukurrpa—A Central Australian term that refers to the *Dreaming*.

Lajamanu—A Warlpiri community located in the Northern Territory.

Manikay—A Yolŋu term for ‘songs’ that are often performed for ceremony.

Milpirri—The biannual festival held at the Lajamanu community, in the Northern Territory.

Noongar—The Indigenous Australian language and cultural group whose home country extends across Perth and the southwest of Western Australia.

Nungarrayi—One of the eight female skin/kinship names given in Warlpiri society.

Ngukurr—An Indigenous Australian community, formerly a Christian mission, located in the southeast of Arnhem Land, Australia.

Ngurra-kurlu—A Warlpiri term meaning ‘home within’; also an important conceptual framework through which Warlpiri and other Indigenous Australian cultural views and ancestral knowledges are cultivated and shared.

Wägilak—The Indigenous Australian language and cultural group that predominantly resides in the community of Ngukurr, but whose traditional home country is Njilipidji.

Warlpiri—The Indigenous Australian language and cultural group whose home country extends across Central Australia, in the Northern Territory.

Waugle—The creative ancestor of the Noongar people, who is metaphysically linked to Perth and other regions in the southwest of Western Australia.

Yidaki—The Yolŋu term for the traditional wood-wind instrument also referred to as the ‘didgeridoo’.

Yolŋu—The Indigenous Australian language and cultural group whose home country extends across Arnhem Land, Australia.

Glossary B

Adavu(s)—The basic dance unit(s)/movement vocabulary learned in the south Indian classical dance form, Bharatanatyam.

Advaita—The philosophical concept of non-duality in which the individual soul (or spirit) is perceived as identical to the universal soul (or spirit); argued by the saint-philosopher Ādi Śaṅkarācārya to be a prominent and essential idea in Hindu/Vedic thought and philosophy.

Aramandi—The ‘half-seated’ position performed in the Bharatanatyam dance style also referred to as the *araimandi* or *ardhamandalam*.

Bharatamuni—The author of the dramaturgical treatise, *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The Sanskrit term *muni* (sage) is added to the author’s given name, Bharata.

Bharatanatyam—The south Indian classical dance genre.

Bhāratavarṣa—The Indian subcontinent.

Bhāva—One’s state of consciousness, which is often related to the emotional states of performers during performance.

Bhūmī—The Earth.

Bhūmī Devī—The ‘Earth Mother’. Also referred to as *Bhū/Bhūmā Devī*.

Bhūmī Praṇāṁ—The ritual actions or movements carried out by Indian classical dancers before and after the dance practice or performance; a cultural form of greeting and acknowledging Mother Earth.

Brahma—The Vedic-Hindu deity who is also the cosmic creator.

Dharma—‘Law’, ‘duty’ and ‘righteousness’, among other things.

Gaṇeśa—The elephant-faced deity of the Hindu pantheon, and the son of Śiva and Pārvatī.

Guru—The teacher or spiritual guide who leads devotees to self-realisation and liberation.

Jīvātamā—The individual soul (or spirit) principle.

Karaṇa—A basic combination of hand and foot movements.

Kathak—The classical dance genre of northern India.

Mārga—‘Pathway’, ‘passage’ or ‘route’.

Nartana Gaṇapati—The ‘dancing gaṇeśa’; the title of the Bharatanatyam dance that was performed during my visit to the Lajamanu community in 2012.

Nāṭya—The combination of dance, drama and music.

Nāṭyaśāstra—The Sanskrit treatise on all aspects of *Nāṭya*, written by Bharatamuni.

Nṛtta—The pure dance aspect of Indian classical dance.

Nṛtya—The expressive or ‘story-telling’ component of Indian classical dance.

Odiṣi—The classical dance style of Odisha (formerly Orissa), in east India.

Paramātamā—The universal soul (or spirit) principle.

Rasa—The ‘taste’, sentimental response or reciprocation of *bhāva*.

Rṣis—The ancient seers of India.

Śakti—Another name for the female principle or cosmic force; consort of Śiva.

Śāstra—A ‘scripture’ or ‘instrument of teaching’ a discipline or body of knowledge.

Sanātana Dharma—‘Eternal Law/Truth’; the ancient name of the Indian belief system now known as ‘Hinduism’.

Śiṣya—The student or disciple.

Śiva—The Vedic/Hindu deity who is the progenitor of dance and who is also envisioned as the destructive force of the cosmos.

Thatti kumbidal—The Bharatanatyam dance salutations to Mother Earth, equivalent to the *Bhūmī Praṇām*.

Vedas—The founding bodies of wisdom that were revealed to the *rṣis*.

Viṣṇu—The cosmic ‘preserver’ of the Hindu pantheon, who reclines on a thousand-headed serpent and returns to earth to restore faith and peace in humanity.

Prelude

The Waugle and the Cobra

It was the last day of the Dance India Taste India Festival 1998 in Perth, Western Australia. More than two thousand people were gathered by the *Derbarl Yerrigan*, the Swan River, to witness an evening of dance and music presented by the Temple of Fine Arts (TFA) International.³ As the evening came to a close, I stood alongside my dance peers and my guru, Swami Shantanand Saraswati,⁴ or Swamiji as we called him. However, instead of our usual finale, the Master of Ceremonies announced: ‘We have in the audience... we are very *blessed* to have in the audience I should say, a tribal elder, from the Bibbulmun tribe’.

Wearing his *booka*, a cloak made with kangaroo skin, and holding a didgeridoo in his hand, the Indigenous Australian elder walked onto the stage, together with his nine-year-old granddaughter, and greeted the dancers with his palms pressed together. He was none other than the prominent Noongar⁵ elder Nundjan Djiridjarkan, also known as Uncle Ken Colbung. The elder and granddaughter, Lalitha, made their way to my guru and touched his feet as per the Indian custom.⁶ Moments later, the entire Esplanade grounds resounded with the rhythmic nuances of the didgeridoo played by Uncle Ken.

When he finished playing, Uncle Ken gifted the wooden instrument to Swamiji (see Figs. I–III), describing the significance of the didgeridoo’s carvings:

³ TFA is a not-for-profit performing arts organisation currently established in Australia, India, Malaysia and Singapore. Founded by Swami Shantanand Saraswati, the collective motto is ‘Art just for the love of it’.

⁴ Swami Shantanand Saraswati was initiated by his Guru, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, into being a *Sannyasi*; that is, one who has renounced everything.

⁵ The term Noongar means ‘a person of the south-west of Western Australia’, or the name for the ‘original inhabitants of the south-west of Western Australia’, of which there are 14 different language groups: Amangu, Yued/Yuat, Whadjuk/Wajuk, Binjareb/Pinjarup, Wardandi, Balardong/Ballardong, Nyakinyaki, Wilman, Ganeang, Bibulmun/Piblemen, Mineng, Goreng, Wudjari and Njunga, which can vary in spelling (Kaartdijin Noongar 2019).

⁶ Apart from the generic greeting with one’s palms pressed together, it is customary to respectfully greet elders and gurus by touching their feet. Traditional greetings or salutations may also involve placing one’s forehead against the feet of the revered individual. The *namaskar* or *namaskaram* is also integral to Hindu customs in which temple grounds, deities, sacred designs and objects are ‘greeted’ through similar adulations.

We have the story of the two camps, India meeting up with Australia, the cobra meeting up with the *Derbal Yerrigan*, that is our *Waugle*, the snake. And so we are very happy that once again after Gondwanaland, we now meet again here. We the Vedas⁷ meet with the Vedas once again here on this holy land. And we are happy that you have come and that you bring such wonderful beautiful culture back to us that we have been holding for you to come meet us in this Gondwanaland.⁸

Upon hearing these words, Swamiji embraced Uncle Ken and then requested all the dancers on stage to pay our respects by touching the elder's feet. Uncle Ken's use of the term 'Gondwanaland' alluded to a deeper assertion of continuing cultural and spiritual connection between the peoples of India and Indigenous Australia. Acknowledging this connection between the two cultures, my guru replied:

May we pray to the divine spirit the Swan River, one day she will bless us, more and more interaction between India and Australia, and Indians and Australians. That is fellow human beings from long, long time ago, we were together; once again the cycle completes itself. We will start again and again a new, great, beautiful journey is my humble prayer.

Seconds after his speech, Swamiji turned around and asked for someone to teach the *thatti kumbidal*⁹ to Uncle Ken's granddaughter. As I was in my guru's direct line of sight at the time, the task of teaching this dance ritual in the South Indian classical genre of Bharatanatyam fell to me. Making my way to Lalitha, I started teaching her the movements of the *thatti kumbidal*.

⁷ The term 'Veda' used in the context of Uncle Ken's speech referred to the Vedic culture founded by the ancient *ṛṣis* (seers) of India, to whom the Vedas—bodies of knowledge—were intuitively revealed. The significance of the Vedas and Hindu cultural ideals are described in Chapter Three.

⁸ India and Australia were once a part of an ancient landmass referred to as Gondwana or Gondwanaland. The continent of Gondwana was named by Austrian scientist Eduard Suess after the Gondwana region of central northern India, the name of which is derived from the Sanskrit for 'forest of the Gonds' (Encyclopedia Britannica 2019).

⁹ The Tamil terms *thatti* (to strike or tap) and *kumbidal* (to pay homage or offer salutations) are used in the south Indian classical dance style Bharatanatyam to refer to the dancers' salutations to Mother Earth. It is also known as the *Bhūmī Praṇām* and is a significant ritual across all Indian classical dance genres.



Fig. I. Uncle Ken Colbung presenting the didgeridoo to Swamiji (Image: Kumar Kandiah)



Fig. II Swamiji receiving the didgeridoo (Image: Kumar Kandiah)



Fig. III The 'Waugle & Cobra' on the didgeridoo (Image: Madhyami Deshmukh)

The night's program ended and the audience dispersed across the Esplanade field. Staff had already begun clearing the festival marquees and dismantling stage equipment, while the performers headed back to the dance studio, which was located across the road. However, as I walked with them, I realised I was still thinking about what had transpired between Uncle Ken and Swamiji earlier that night. I was inexplicably moved by their revelation on the connections between Indian and Indigenous Australian peoples and cultures.

Two weeks later, Lalitha and her two cousins came to learn Bharatanatyam in TFA and I became their teacher. We spent the summer dancing at the TFA studio in Perth city and in the lounge room of my parents' home. Through our regular meetings, I came to know more about Uncle Ken; he never presented himself as the historic Noongar activist that I had learned about in high school, but rather as an extremely polite and humble personality. He was always punctual and happy to share his cultural knowledge. Above all else, I remember his generosity: when he brought his grandchildren for their dance classes, he never came empty handed.¹⁰

It was not long before Uncle Ken became an important figure in my life, along with my guru Swamiji. Their collective vision planted in me the seeds of inquiry on the affinities between the two ancient civilisations of India and Indigenous Australia. All aspects of my research are in some way or form linked to these two strong cultural leaders who put me on this unique path, along which I would re-learn dance.

In retrospect, the festival's finale involved a truly profound cultural dialogue between Swamiji and Uncle Ken. They shared an honest and open exchange through words and actions that sought, at one level, to reinstate the relationship between Indigenous Australia and India, or *Bhāratavarṣa*,¹¹ by the banks of the *Derbarl Yerrigan*, on the Noongar *boodjar*.¹²

¹⁰ Whenever Uncle Ken brought his grandchildren to class, he would often bring fruit or food as a gift. He also gave me several *kylies* (boomerangs), books on Noongar culture and videos of traditional dances. On one occasion, he even brought his lawnmower and insisted on mowing the overgrown grass in our backyard.

¹¹ Another name for India: '*Bhārata*' is associated with Bharata, one of the greatest rulers of the country, while the suffix *varṣa* translates to 'continent'. Several other names for India are found in the Vedic literature and oral histories, including *Āryāvarta*, 'the whole central region between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains' (Swami Sivananda 1999, 4), and *Jambūdvīpa*, referring to the entire subcontinent.

¹² The Noongar language term 'boodjar' means country or land. It is 'inclusive of ecosystem and people' (Wooltorton, Collard and Horwitz 2014, 12).

Beginnings on Boodjar

A reddish-orange tinge gradually fills the skyline as the sun disappears behind the Perth hill known as *Kaarta Koomba* (see Fig. IV).¹³ The bluish-purple shades of the *Derbarl Yerrigan* meander through the landscape, reflecting the path of the creative ancestor, the *Waugle*, as it moved through and shaped the Noongar country.

Woolah!

You came, Warrgul [Waugle],

With a flash of fire and a thunder roar, and

As you came, you flung the earth up to the sky,

You formed the mountain ranges and the undulating plains.

You made a home for me

On Kargattup and Karta Koomba,

You made the beeyol beeyol, the wide clear river,

As you travelled onward to the sea.

And as you went into the sunset,

Two rocks you left to mark your passing,

To tell of your returning

And our affinity.

(Davis 1984, 12)¹⁴

¹³ The Noongar language terms *Kaarta* (hill or headland) and *Koomba* (big) are among the many names for Kings Park (<http://www.bgpa.wa.gov.au/kings-park/visit/history/aboriginal-history>). The cultural significance and importance of this hill is depicted in the oral histories of the Noongar people and their *boodjar*, which extends across the southwest of Western Australia (Collard, Harben and van den Berg 2004).

¹⁴ This chant was written for a play titled 'Kullark', by the late Noongar poet and author Jack Davis. Specifically, these lines were written for the part of Yagan, a famous Noongar hero who fought for the rights of his people during the initial period of colonisation in Perth, Western Australia.



Fig. IV The Derbarl Yerrigan, and Sunset Behind Kaarta Koomba

My eyes follow the bends of the *Derbarl Yerrigan* at dusk and arrive at *Bootanup*, also known as Pelican Point. I recall some of my earliest, and fondest, memories of dancing in this area during the summer of 1985 with Guru Surayakala.¹⁵ A renowned dance guru, Guru Surayakala was in Perth for only a few months, to share her knowledge of Bharatanatyam with the children of the Indian diaspora, like myself. ‘*Thei ya-thei, kita thaka, thei ya-thei*’, she would recite, as we danced the basic movement vocabularies, or *adavus*,¹⁶ by the shores of *Bootanup*, where the *Djarlgarro Beeliar* (Canning River) and *Derbarl Yerrigan* flow into confluence.

While this experience with Guru Suryakala was short lived, I nevertheless continued to learn¹⁷ and perform Indian classical and folk dances for the Hindu festivals celebrated by Perth’s Indian communities. When my family relocated to Singapore in 1988 (until 1991), I recommenced

¹⁵ Guru Suryakala is one of the international directors of TFA. She currently resides in Chennai, where she continues to pass on her knowledge. She is also an esteemed disciple of the famous Guru Dandayuthapani Pillai, who is known for his distinct *bani*—particular movement style, coupled with vocabulary and unique compositions and choreographies—which continue to be performed by Bharatanatyam artists around the world.

¹⁶ The *adavus* are the basic dance steps and vocabulary of the Bharatanatyam dance genre. They are divided into several groups based on movement techniques. Students are generally taught the multiple *adavus* prior to performing dance items, and whole repertoires are built upon this basic syllabus.

¹⁷ I had briefly learned Bharatanatyam under Guru Srimati Bhavani Sivakumar in Perth. My annual visits to Singapore also led to my exposure and training in Indian classical and folk dance practices.

Bharatanatyam training under the tutelage of Guru Kamakshi Jayaraman,¹⁸ whom I address as Maami. Under Maami, I completed my *arangetram*,¹⁹ an important milestone in Indian classical dance training, for which I was required to perform a solo Bharatanatyam repertoire to a live orchestra.

Within a month of having finished my *arangetram* in Singapore, my family returned to Western Australia, where I became a Bharatanatyam teacher in TFA, Perth. Here, I was given the opportunity to perform alongside and be mentored by senior dancers.²⁰ However, my bond with Maami was maintained through frequent trips to Singapore and India, organised by Swamiji, allowing her to continue guiding me in Bharatanatyam and *nattuwanggam*.²¹

As a student and teacher in TFA, I was given the opportunity to learn and perform different Indian classical dance forms apart from Bharatanatyam. These included Odissi, Kathak and Kathakali. I was also taught a range of folk and semi-classical genres, as well as ballet and contemporary dance. A severe ankle injury would bring my dreams of pursuing dance as a profession to a halt; however, fortuitously, it was around this time that I came into contact with the Noongar elder Uncle Ken and his grandchildren. Our regular meetings during dance classes gradually influenced my perception of dance, while reiterating the cultural connections that he and Swamiji frequently discussed.

¹⁸ Guru Kamakshi Jayaraman, one of the budding disciples of Vazhuvur Ramaiah Pillai, led TFA Singapore's Bharatanatyam faculty. She has since moved to Coimbatore, India to head the TFA there, where she continues to mentor students.

¹⁹ The Tamil term '*arangetram*' means to step onto stage, indicating a practice in the arts where the performer's debut recital is in front of an audience. While the *arangetram* requires discipline and determination, Swamiji likened this event to graduation from kindergarten, because learning never stops. Therefore, the *arangetram* is perceived as a 'baby step' towards understanding the wisdom of our Indian ancestors through the medium of dance. During my *arangetram* period, I was also lovingly mentored by Srimati Usha Dorai, who was teaching in TFA Singapore at the time. She is now the director of her own dance institution, Laasya Arts, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

²⁰ Namely, Sukhi Shetty-Krishnan, Sarasa Krishnan, Umesh Shetty and Shankar Kandasamy.

²¹ The *nattuwangam* is the metal symbol used to enhance the rhythmic nuances of the dancer's feet. It is also an art, whereby the person who plays the *nattuwangam* also recites the *sollukattu*, or pneumatic syllables, usually as part of the live dance recital.

Reconnecting Gondwana Cultures

Prior to meeting Swamiji in 1998, Uncle Ken had already discovered a deep resonance between India and Indigenous Australia. He often spoke to me about his initial visit in 1997 to Madhya Pradesh, India, where he experienced an immediate connection with the land, the culture and the people. Having met the tribal Gonds²² in this region, Uncle Ken felt that they must have had a common ancestry with Indigenous Australians (Desai 1997). Similarly, when the elder travelled to the state of Odisha (formerly Orissa), he was frequently mistaken for a local. These were the stories I would hear whenever Uncle Ken brought his grandchildren for dance lessons.

Swamiji and Uncle Ken shared a beautiful friendship that I watched grow during subsequent cultural events, to which Swamiji always wanted Uncle Ken invited as a chief guest. I vividly recall Uncle Ken singing his ceremonial 'Welcome',²³ incorporating Swamiji's name, at the inauguration of Annalakshmi on the Swan.²⁴ Looking back at this moment, I see it was another unique moment of collaboration between the elder and Swamiji, who naturally embraced each other's cultural ways.

The last time the two leaders met was in Perth in 2004, for the opening of Saraswati Mahavidhyalaya (SMV), a holistic educational community founded on Vedic principles of inquiry.²⁵ Once again, Swamiji had requested the presence of Uncle Ken for this special event, and of course the elder obliged. A year later, Swamiji attained *mahā samādhi*,²⁶ discarding his physical form. Upon hearing the news, Uncle Ken wished to pay his respects via ceremonial

²² The Gonds, who also call themselves Koi or Koitur, are one of the main tribes in central India.

²³ A 'Welcome to Country' takes the form of a speech, song and/or dance, and is often made by an Indigenous Australian elder or member of the community who hold custodianship over the land or country on which the event is taking place. In the case that there is no one to perform this 'Welcome', a verbal Acknowledgment of Country can be carried out by the hosts of the event. It is considered an important 'ceremony [that] acknowledges and recognizes the rights of traditional land owners. Its purpose is to respectfully acknowledge the past and present peoples on whose land you may be visiting and give visitors safe passage' (<http://www.artsedge.dca.wa.gov.au/resources/Pages/Welcome-to-Country.aspx>).

²⁴ Annalakshmi is the not-for-profit culinary wing of TFA International.

²⁵ SMV's educational lenses center on the *Mundaka Upanishad*, an ancient Vedic text that articulates ideas about knowledge and paths of inquiry towards the absolute. Bharatanatyam and other Indian performing arts genres taught under TFA Perth continue to be disseminated under the broad philosophical ideals of SMV.

²⁶ The Sanskrit term used when saints or holy people leave their physical form. From a Hindu perspective, the spirit never dies, and evolved beings such as saints are considered to have merged into the universal consciousness.

offerings, which he made on the shore of *Derbarl Yerrigan* in Perth. These offerings were made alongside the Hindu rituals performed in commemoration of our guru.

Uncle Ken continued to attend the cultural programs hosted by SMV and Annalakshmi. He was instrumental in arranging *Bootanup* (Pelican Point) as the venue for Swamiji's birthday ceremony in 2006. For this event, Uncle Ken organised a special Noongar ceremonial performance minutes before the sunrise. Little did we know that we would hardly see him after this event. A series of health issues prevented the elder from attending public functions and events. Almost four years had passed when we heard that this great soul of the Bibbulmen Noongar tribe had passed away. His passing, on 13 January 2010, marked a significant moment of loss for many of us in Australia. The experience also left me wondering about the shared cultural insights espoused by both Uncle Ken and Swamiji.

Guided and inspired by the elder and my guru, I embarked on an academic journey that eventually led me to re-searching Gondwana and the 'meeting of the two camps': Australia and India, the Waagle and the Cobra, by way of dance. It is this goal—both intellectual and creative—that this thesis addresses.

Chapter One: Introduction

Re-Searching Gondwana

This thesis examines the ontologies embedded in Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices through a framework of performative dialogue and exchange. It proposes that there is an intercultural field where a 'dialogue' can be conceptualised as an emergent and adaptive space of artistic expression. These performative domains, in which cultural knowledge is nurtured and renewed, are further investigated through the conceptual framework of 'dancescape': the central premise of this thesis. To implement this approach, the chapter initially considers the ancient geographical and human connections between India and Australia. A section on the research background then acknowledges the cultural and performative guidance given by Warlpiri elder, Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick (Jampijimpa).¹ The inspiration drawn from both Jampijimpa's conceptualisations of speaking to the animate land and Professor Bose's vision of 'Re-imagining Gondwana' through artistic exchange and production is discussed. Following this, the key research questions and hypotheses of the thesis are presented, and the overarching conceptual and theoretical frameworks that were used to explore the dancescapes in dialogue are detailed. This introductory chapter ends with a summary of the creative thesis and an outline of the overall thesis structure, both as chapter text and video.

¹ I refer to the elder as 'Jampijimpa', which is one of the eight (male) skin/kinship names in Warlpiri society. It relates to his culturally specific role and identity within his society. The significance of skin/kinship names are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter, but are elaborated on in Chapter Four.

Gondwana Connections

Ancient Lands

India and Australia share significant historical connections, with the earliest natural link between them commencing from 1 billion to 600 million years ago. At that time, the two countries formed part of a supercontinent known as Gondwanaland. This ancient landmass contained present day India, Australia, Africa, Arabia, Antarctica, Madagascar and South America. The formation and separation of the Indian and Australian subcontinents over the millennia also mirror the ongoing coming together and breaking apart of various landscapes throughout Earth's complex history (Agarwal 2012, 14). These geophysical changes, which commenced approximately 180 million years ago, resulted in the current map of the Earth² and produced an oceanic divide between India and Australia.

Despite their separation, the two Gondwana continents visibly retain geographical traces of their ancient connected past:

Anyone who has travelled through India's red laterite plains of the deep southern states cannot help but feel the rapport with regions of Australia. It suffuses the psyche as well as the earth: a landscape tired, dramatically smoothed and wrinkled by centuries of assault, eroded down by forces of salt-laden wind, earthquake and relentless sun. Until India, infinitely slowly, began to drift away from Gondwanaland. (Holroyde and Westrip 2010, 10)

Millions of years after their continental separation, the journey of modern humans from India to Australia resulted in certain shared genetic markers and socio-historical links between the two Gondwana countries (Goodall, Ghosh and Todd 2008; Kumar et al. 2009; Pugach et al. 2013). The earliest-known genetic history between the two continents is based on the study of modern human migration out of Africa around 150,000 years ago (*Science Daily* 2007). Early human populations were known to have travelled through India to Australia via the southeast

² The current map of the Earth is not static, but always shifting. This is due to the tectonic plates that annually shift around 7 cm, resulting in the continuous re-modelling of the outer layers of the planet (Park and Allaby 2013).

Asian corridor, thus creating the common genetic markers between the two civilisations (Kumar et al. 2009). However, a more recent discovery suggests that a group of continental Indians found their way to Australia approximately 4,230 years ago. This particular wave of migration is said to coincide with 'changes in tool technology, food processing' and the arrival of the dingo (Pugach et al. 2013).³

The arrival of the British colonisers in Australia also brought another wave of Indian and South Asian settlers, who worked for the Empire at the time (Goodall, Ghosh and Todd 2008). Entering the country as lascars or seamen, skilled labourers, servants, nannies and traders under the colonial rule, the life stories of these people go unmentioned 'in the official immigration records', but have remained in the 'memories and momentos of the communities into which they might have moved' (44). Inquiries into maritime trades and Indigenous Australian communities have since revealed alternate histories of Indian settlers as 'individuals with complex personal and working histories, [and] ... activists in the campaigns against racial discrimination and in support of decolonization' (44).

While there are socio-political, historic, economic, cultural and religious differences across and between the peoples of India and Australia, perceptions of cultural and ontological connections remain in their 'shared soil' (Bose 2012–13). For example, to Indigenous peoples of both countries the soil is not just an inert physical dimension of Earth, but a living being imbued with consciousness, intelligence and its own metaphysical history (Bird Rose 2000; Harding 2010; Hokari 2011; Neo Frics 2010; Swami Shantanand Saraswati 1978; Patrick 2015). Inspired by these perceptions of connectedness, this thesis examines the ontologies (ways of being) and epistemologies (ways of knowing) embedded in Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices. The following section outlines the research journey and inspiration that led to my creative encounters and exploration of these two cultural expressions of dance.

³ While the gene flow from India to Australia is not in question, the direct arrival of this population from India to Australia, rather than via the southeast Asian land bridge (Pugach et al. 2013), and the suggestion that these new arrivals introduced new tools and technologies as well as the dingo have been brought into question (Pugach and Stoneking 2013). However, Pugach and Stoneking (2013) address this 'controversy' by stating that, while they 'do not link the gene flow directly to the archaeological changes' as their 'work is based solely on genetic evidence', they nonetheless suggest that the 'inferred date of migration fits very well with the "classical" view of mid-Holocene changes in Australia'. In addition, geneticists note that given the advanced capabilities of India's early maritime industry, 'people could have sailed directly from India to Australia, either deliberately or accidentally' (Pugach and Stoneking 2013).

Research Background: Sources of Creative Inspiration

Speaking to Country

Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick is an initiated Warlpiri elder and leader from the Central Australian community of Lajamanu. I first met Jampijimpa in 2011 during a colloquium held at the School of Music in the Australian National University (ANU), Canberra; however, my research and insights into his culture and philosophical views only emerged during his term as a visiting Australian Research Council Research Fellow (2012–14). In that time, Jampijimpa contributed to the pedagogical design of the *Indigenous Music and Media* course that I attended on campus. Convened by Dr Aaron Corn, the course provided a unique window of learning and engagement with Warlpiri and other Indigenous Australian modes of performativity. Jampijimpa also invited students such as myself to attend the biannual Milpirri Festival (2012), held in his community later that year.⁴ I soon realised that the intercultural metaphors engaged in this festival paralleled my Indian dance research experience. In both traditions, cultural differences and resonances were embraced and negotiated through artistic exchange.

I was fascinated by Jampijimpa's transmission to ANU students, the public and his Warlpiri kin of Warlpiri epistemology, which embraced the idea that all Indigenous societies across Australia are linked by certain common understandings of the world. His view is expressed through the phrase 'same but different',⁵ emphasising the deep cultural affinities underlying the apparent diversity in Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being, connected to their ancestral lands or country. Jampijimpa also highlighted that this interconnectedness is epitomised through an ancient songline he had learned from his elders. The awareness and practice of interlinking people to their home countries through stories in song, dances and visual designs remains ingrained in the cultural psyche of Australia's First Peoples. Embedded therein is the collective understanding of 'home', on and *as* the sentient land. This simple, yet

⁴ The Milpirri Festival is a collaboration between Tracks Dances Company in Darwin and the Warlpiri community of Lajamanu, Central Australia.

⁵ Jampijimpa frequently used this phrase when describing Indigenous Australian cultures and customs, including dance practices.

densely layered, paradigm of relationality is entrenched in ancestral knowledge that is waiting to be ‘hunted’; that is, actively sought out and explored by the curious (Garma Festival 2014).

My awareness of Indigenous Australian culture was further adapted and developed through my Warlpiri skin name *Nungarrayi*. Given to me by Jampijimpa, this skin identity connected me to the Warlpiri society and systems of kinship, through which I acquired a new set of obligations, including the cultural responsibilities of dance.⁶ This engagement with and research on Warlpiri and other Indigenous Australian cultures of dance gradually influenced my Indian classical dance practice. The extent of the shift in my performative psyche became apparent to me when I returned to my hometown of Perth and found that, whenever I danced upon the earth floor, I could *see* and *feel* this as the sentient *boodjar*, the Noongar name for ‘land’ or ‘country’. These cultural perspectives increasingly framed my creative and performative underpinnings and experiences, revealing the possibility of a deeper artistic exploration as a dialogue between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices.

Dialoguing Cultural Perspectives

This dialogue between Indian and Indigenous worlds of dance invited a range of performative shifts that, in turn, influenced my views and practice of these creative intercultural dialogues. These implicit and explicit moments of exchange further rekindled memories of the initial spoken dialogues between Uncle Ken and Swamiji mentioned in the thesis Prelude; their views of the tangible physical and spiritual relationships between the ‘two camps’ and two peoples of ancient Gondwanaland were now pursued in the discussions between Jampijimpa and me. At this time, my research was focused exclusively on Indigenous Australian dance traditions, but that was about to change.

During one of our casual conversations, Jampijimpa questioned why my research was only based on Indigenous Australian dance; why not examine ‘both our dance cultures’? I explained that my reluctance to conduct such a complex investigation was due to concerns about how

⁶ The *kurrwa* or ‘skin name immediately gives a person a place in Warlpiri society because they have a known set of relationships’ (Patrick, Holmes and Box 2008, 12). Through this system of relationality, one becomes a part of the extensive Warlpiri cultural network and *Warlajja yapa*—family. As expressed by Jampijimpa (11): ‘Skin starts with yourself. It is about relationships to people, place, and country. Skin is a system of relatedness, connectedness, how things integrate, roles, functions, boundaries, limits. That’s an important word “kurrwa” [“stone axe” which is symbolic of responsibility], skin name holds that one’.

easily both art forms could be reduced and reified to naïve essentialism. Simultaneously, I agreed it was difficult to dismiss the numerous performative affinities that were apparent between the two dance practices. With Jampijimpa's advice and support, I started my inquiry into the dance phenomena underlying both our ancient cultures. I explored, and in turn improvised upon, the dialogues between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices. These dialogues are central to the creative exegesis of this thesis and were also inspired through the re-imagining of Gondwanaland.

'Re-imagining Gondwana'

This thesis draws inspiration from Professor Neeti Sethi Bose (2012–13, 7), who argues that the artistic affinities felt by Indigenous peoples of Gondwana countries need to be investigated. Bose argues for the crucial need to bring 'Indigenous knowledge—ideas, stories, myths, cultural production, artistic practices and more—[into collaboration, in the hope of] creating a learning environment' (7). Her views inform the creative imperative of this thesis, which explores the 'same but different' cultural knowledges embedded in Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices. Added inspiration is drawn from the idea that these two extremely large dance cultures emerged from 'shared soil' (7).

Bose's vision of exploring the possibilities of cultural knowledge exchange and production reflects those of Uncle Ken, Swamiji and Jampijimpa. Collectively, these were the sources of inspiration for my own engagement with and exploration of Indian classical and Indigenous Australian 'dancescapes in dialogue': the central premise and method of research through which performative ontologies could be unearthed. With that overarching framework in mind, the following section describes the key research questions and hypotheses of this thesis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This thesis examines the cultural meanings and philosophies embraced in Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices. It proposes that there are dialogical encounters within intercultural performative domains that invite a continuum of unfolding moments in which boundaries of difference and similarity are made manifest and thereby interpreted and

⁷ 'Re-imagining Gondwana' is the primary title of Professor Neeti Sethi Bose's article 2012–13 on which this thesis draws.

acted upon. Accordingly, these varied aspects of performativity are reviewed through the concept of 'dancescape(s)'—the phenomenological perception of dance central to my thesis. The 'dancescape' interweaves the potential corporeal, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, metaphysical and other inexplicable encounters via the human experience of dance.

Through this performative premise, this thesis explores Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes in dialogue. The exploration resulted in a deep-felt affinity arising between contemporary expressions of *Nr̥tta*, or the 'pure dance'⁸ aspect of Indian classical dance practices, and Warlpiri, Yolŋu, Noongar and other Indigenous Australian dance perspectives.

Within this context, my research asks the following questions:

- What are the significant performative characteristics and ontological foundations of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance?
- Are there any significant ontological and performative resonances between the two dance practices? If yes, what are they?
- What are the possibilities of exchange, improvisation and collaboration between the two dance practices?
- How do dancescapes in dialogue express and renew traditional worldviews in contemporary performative domains?

Linked to these queries were the following hypotheses:

1. Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices are ontologically grounded in ways of knowing, doing and being in relation to the animate landscapes. From this standpoint, the human body as a cultural expression of dance is an imperative frame of connectivity and correspondence, between self and ancestors, spirits and place, and people and sentient landscapes.
2. If Indigenous histories and memories can be hypothesised to be embedded in landscapes, they can also be revitalised and re-created through culturally informed

⁸ The concept of *Nr̥tta*, enumerated in the sage-author Bharatamuni's scripture, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is elaborated on in Chapter Three.

physical movements. Such movements are not mere imitations or enactments, but constitute the tangible presencing of the metaphysical ancestors. The human body is posed as a conduit whereby movement patterns and vocabularies are catalysts of deeper metaphysical realisation.

3. If dance can be understood as outlined in hypothesis 2, then it is an important vehicle for nurturing and re-embodying ancestral bodies of lore. These performative insights are mirrored in Deidre Sklar's view that 'ideologies of embodiment as well as techniques of the body are encoded in culturally specific ways, in different systems of writing' (Sklar 2009, 170). From this perspective, Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices are inherently designed to write and rewrite histories via embodied encounters. As such, these cultural expressions of dance engage in non-linear constructs of time and place–(space) relations.

By investigating these questions and hypotheses, this thesis determines that the different movement vocabularies and techniques encountered in Indigenous Australian performative domains resonate strongly with the Indian classical aspect of *Nṛtta*, or 'pure dance'. Further, embedded in these similar movement vocabularies and techniques is an ontological premise that connects people over time to all aspects of their animate home country. From an Indigenous cultural perspective, dance facilitates speaking and listening to the land. This mode of communication also invites encounters of 'being and becoming' the 'Other'. Dancing upon country or the earth involves more than mimicry, because these movement vocabularies are tangible manifestations of the metaphysical.

Unsurprisingly, a part of this thesis research journey deepened my views of Indian classical dance and other cultural articulations of dance. From this perspective, my thesis contributes a unique dance pedagogy that speaks to scholars wishing to engage with, explore and renew Indigenous knowledges through the innovative lens of dancescaping in dialogue.

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks used to unearth these hypotheses are now discussed.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Dance

First and foremost, the thesis research is founded upon an acknowledgement that there are multiple worldviews of 'dance'. Dance is a powerful concept and tool of human expression that is engaged differently by different cultures and societies around the world. However, importantly, Indigenous dance cultures share the view that dance is not just a set of corporeal movements performed to specific rhythms and/or melodies for social entertainment; rather, dance is posed and experienced as linking our bodies with something greater than ourselves and with the material world. It is symbolic, creative, ontological, experiential and communicative of deeper shared insights about our existence in the world. By drawing on this multifaceted lens of dance and performativity, I developed the concept of 'dancescapes' as a framework within which the phenomenon of dance is explored.

The 'Dancescape'

The term dancescape(s) is not unique to this thesis, though its expanded application as part of a creative methodology is. The term has been used by other scholars to bring attention to the mobility of dance as a concept that goes beyond the mundane spaces of performativity. Drawing on Appadurai's (1996) concept of 'scape', Theatre and Dance Professor Kin-Yan Szeto (2010, 417) described 'dancescape' as 'an interconnected discourse of dance, a shared ground that extends beyond Eurocentric accounts that hold centre stage, allowing cultural differences to occur in the narration of dance historiography'. She envisions the dancescape as an innovative and interactive performative space.

Szeto's perception of the dancescape is tied to the works of the acclaimed choreographer Lin Hwai-Min, whose work she describes as confronting and 'unsettl[ing] Orientalist perspectives of the East by effectively integrating Asian aesthetics and European American aesthetics to create a transcultural artwork' (Szeto 2010, 439). Under the premise of analysing and adhering to Lin's performance aspiration, Szeto argues:

The structure of the dancescape connects the past and the present, the close and the distant, the East and the West. It offers new understandings of how somatic experience can move beyond territorial boundaries of

locality and nation, and further suggests how exclusive historiographies can be challenged and contested. (439)

Similarly, Dr Tamara Johnson (2011, 282) notes how 'memory, heritage, identity, and a sense of place in the world' are practiced and navigated through contemporary salsa and Cape jazz dance forms in Cape Town, South Africa. Johnson further suggests that the collective impact and influence of geography in performance are importantly embedded within the idea of the dancescape(s): 'an amalgamation of dance scenes that are often interlinked either through geographic proximity, membership networks, or influence' and where 'salsa's global industry' is also viewed as a dancescape. Johnson (2–3) further highlights that:

Dancescapes require movement through space; the interaction of bodies as they navigate the dance floor as well as the transfer of emotion and energy between participants. Dancescapes incorporate ritual and embodied memory, while simultaneously recognizing the ever evolving patterns of dance movements and shifting social contexts.

The term 'scape' resonates with the profound relationships through which performers and viewers connect to the animate environment: namely, the landscapes, seascapes, natural bodies of water and mountainous regions, constellations, creative and cosmic scapes. The term 'scape' also places emphasis on 'the fluid, irregular shapes' of dance practice, which 'are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather ... are deeply perspectival constructs' (Appadurai 1996, 33).

Johnson's (2011) and Szeto's (2010) analyses of the sociocultural, religious and political experience of dance through the 'dancescape' have informed my own understandings of this word as both a conceptual lens and a potential research method. The dancescape is perceived as the intersection and interweaving of the corporeal, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and metaphysical encounters activated by way of dance. This view of dance acts as an important framework for exploring Indigenous performativity. As an experiential premise, the concept also draws on my own performative experience and encounters over more than three decades. Thus, the scope of this creative thesis is guided by my observation of and participation in dance across different locations of time, place and performative space. This approach is reiterated

through the suffix 'scape', which posits dance as an encounter unregulated by the singular and/or linear correlations of space-time.

In its totality, the concept of the dancescape mirrors the multifaceted consciousness, expression and insights of the dancer and his/her performative encounter(s). In this way, the dancescape is posed as a crucial paradigm of dance, founded on Indigenous truths that can move away from or decentre the 'colonial psyche'.⁹ It is through this multi-layered concept of the dancescape that the diverse ideas and worldviews of Indigenous Australian and classical Indian dance practice are investigated in this thesis.

Intrinsic to the concept of the 'dancescape' is the idea of 'dialoguing' or the 'dialogic process'. The methodological and analytic nuances that arise from employing a dialogic process in the context of dance are detailed in the following section.

'Dialoguing'

At any given time, our ways of seeing, hearing and sensing ourselves and others in the world are in a perpetual flux of 'dialogue', interaction and exchange. Extending on Professor Alberto Franco's (2006, 814) definition of dialogue, as a means to 'jointly create meaning and shared understanding' through conversation, this thesis starts from the view that dance is dialogic; it is an intentional performance that strives to communicate and create shared understanding. When situated within broader performative domains, such dialogic interactions may be implicit and/or explicit, voluntary and/or involuntary, between performers, and between performers and the audience.

Within the performative method of this research, dialogues are also posed as occurring between performers and sentient landscapes. From this viewpoint, dialoguing is explored as a flexible encounter activated within and through the 'dancescape'. Through purposefully initiated, improvised dialogues between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dances, this research turns to ethnologist Deidre Sklar's theoretical views of movement knowledge.

⁹ I use this term to refer to the colonial thought rather than colonisers themselves. This term highlights the colonial mindset or psyche as the continued effect of colonial power and colonisation that perpetually seeks to frame Indigenous cultural thought and performance in contemporary society.

Sklar's Approach to Dance

Deidre Sklar (1994, 12) suggests that 'movement embodies socially constructed cultural knowledge in which corporeality, emotion, and abstraction are intertwined'. Sklar's premise is that cultural knowledges are potentially realised through dancers' corporeal imitations of culturally specific movements and gestures. She argues that this approach 'has been too often trivialized or ignored in academic discourse' (12).

Drawing from her own experiences, Sklar theorises that it is compliance with the 'corporeal conventions' of any religion or culture, irrespective of one's belief in these, which provide insight into particular worldviews (Sklar 1994, 13). These movements and gestures expressed by way of the body are also seen as methods of embodying culture-specific doctrines (13). In effect, the participatory *doing* enables and provides insights into ways of *being*. Accordingly, Sklar (1991, 30–32) advocates 'five premises for a culturally sensitive approach to dance':

1. Movement knowledge is a kind of cultural knowledge: to speak of movement as a way of knowing implies that the way people move is as much a clue to who they are as the way they speak.
2. Movement knowledge is conceptual and emotional as well as kinesthetic. It addresses: Where do I belong in the world? How do humans behave? Where do I come from and with whom do I go through life?
3. Movement knowledge is intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge: speaking or singing and movement are usually combined to express culture.
4. One has to look beyond movement to get at its meaning: the concepts embedded in movement are not necessarily evident in the movement itself.
5. Movement is always an immediate corporeal experience: the cultural knowledge that is embodied in movement can only be known via movement.

Sklar's five premises of dance form an integral part of the methodology adopted in this creative thesis. In particular, her premises frame the possibility of a performative inquiry into knowing, doing and *being* dance. Interestingly, Sklar's approach along with 'dancescapes in dialogue' are both revealed and explicated through the classical Indian dramaturgical concept of *abhinaya*.

Abhinaya

The Sanskrit term '*abhinaya*' means 'to guide or lead towards', and in the context of the performing arts can be understood as the 'mode' or 'method' through which the art is conveyed. Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (1967) describes four modes of '*abhinaya*' that are essential in articulating or 'carrying out' the Indian classical artistic form of *Nāṭya* (dance, drama and music) set out in Bharatamuni's treatise. A more concise manual of the Indian performing arts, the *Abhinaya Darpana* by Nandikeśvara (1997), also depicts the same four modes of *abhinaya* in the following *dhyana śloka*, or contemplative chant/verse, in praise of the Hindu icon Śiva: '*āṅgikam bhuvanam yasya, vācikaṃ sarva vāṅgmayam, āhāryam candra tārādi, tam namah sātvikam śivam*' [His body (*āṅgika*) is the entire universe; His speech (*vācika*) is the sound vibrations thereof; His ornaments are the moon and stars (*āhārya*); Humble salutations to this pure (*sātvika*) Śiva]. In this verse, *āṅgika* relates to the corporeal; *vācika* embraces song, speech and music; *āhārya* refers to the costumes, ornaments and set design; and *sātvika* corresponds to the performers' states of mind or consciousness.

These four types of *abhinaya*, which act as important reference points for diverse traditions of Indian dance and drama, can arguably be adapted to any performance convention. As such, this thesis draws on the resonating attributes of *abhinaya* prevalent in Indigenous Australian performative domains—through dance, visual designs, music and sacred props (Berndt et al. 1978; Corn 2009)—to examine their agency within dancescapes. The four modes of *abhinaya*—corporeal; verbal, vocal and instrumental communication; costuming and design; and performer psyche and consciousness—are the main reference points by which this thesis navigates the practice-led encounters of the dancescape. This has led me to explore a range of research methods, as detailed in the following section, to yield a broad awareness of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical performances.

Research Methods

Literature and Performance Reviews

Research was conducted through reading and analysing a range of scholarly writings in Indigenous studies, performance studies, dance studies, history, anthropology and philosophy, to cover some of the disciplinary sources. Over the years 2011–2016, I also repeatedly viewed

a range of Indigenous Australian films and documentaries that showcased dance. These films and documentaries were accessed at ANU's Chifley Library, the National Film and Sound Archives of Australia and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

An important aspect of my research were the extensive periods of fieldwork that I undertook from mid-2011 through to 2016 across a range of sites, including Perth, Western Australia (WA); Ngukurr, Lajamanu and Gulkula, the Northern Territory (NT); and Canberra. During the fieldwork, I met and conversed with gurus, elders, cultural leaders and dance performers, and conducted structured and semi-structured interviews to gain people's thoughts on Indigenous culture, history, ceremony, dance and other performance traditions. Where appropriate, face-to-face meetings were documented using smartphones and video cameras, with the participants' consent. Follow-up conversations occurred via emails, text messages, phone calls and FaceTime video calls. The research approach was outlined and endorsed through an application to the ANU ethics committee.

Writing Autoethnography

This thesis draws on the method of autoethnography: a versatile tool of expression and inquiry that 'combines characteristics of *autobiography* and *ethnography*' (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). 'Autoethnography is a way of researching and writing that seeks to connect the personal to the cultural, placing the self at all times within a social context' (Freeman 2010, 181).¹⁰ This method was further influenced by Professor Kirin Narayan's style of writing, which is 'forged from an alloy of ethnography and creative nonfiction' (Narayan 2012, 4), and is at once a reflexive ethnography and creative text. Indeed, Narayan (xi) perceives the craft of writing as having the potential to project and 'cultivate an attentiveness to life itself, and to enhance perceptions with the precision of words'.

Central to this creative writing approach as used in this thesis was the reflexive process of 'recall', which sought to take the mind back to relive and review personal experiences. Videos,

¹⁰ In a research context, autoethnography implies experiential knowledge, containing not only the period of the study in question but also the uncovering and interweaving of past and present knowledge. In other words, autoethnographical research investigates knowledge regarding the feeling of what happens, rather than having a focus on what happened (Freeman 2010, 182).

images, music scores and texts were used to rekindle memories of significance to the thesis. Alternate insights and analyses of these events were produced using this method. Accordingly, the collaborative approach of recall applied within autoethnography allowed me to examine the dancescapes as a subjective as well as observed experience.

However, my attempts to develop an honest ethnographic voice also invited a sense of uncertainty. I was often concerned about discussing heightened performative experiences and/or the insights that I had encountered, and I was conscious about discussing certain traditional and cultural knowledge and ideas given to me by elders and gurus. The writing process involved filtering this sensitive information, increasing my confidence in sharing the intimate insights into knowing and being generated by this research.

The more I wrote about the dancescapes, the more I wished to re-present these through film. Dance is not only to be performed, but is also to be experienced through seeing and hearing. For this reason, I adopted 'the visual' method to document, illustrate and add depth to the artistic affinities being discovered through my exploration of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes in dialogue. The details of this visualisation approach are now discussed.

'The Visual' Method in the Creative Component

A visual method was used in the thesis to recreate the journey of the dancescapes through a series of videos. The creative component of this thesis is forged through both written text and videos in an attempt to creatively fuse both the written word and visual into a combined language of the dancescape.

The visual rendition of the dancescapes reveals layers of performative interaction, innovation and exchange across diverse locations and timeframes. The audio-visual collages of these moments are deliberately constructed as a single domain of performativity in each video. In this way, 'the visual' design is intended to invoke altered states of thinking, feeling and knowing by *seeing* 'dance' through film. The final edited form of all video material used for this thesis was directed and produced by me, with permissions obtained from the participants and other contributors. These videos were solely developed for the purpose of this research and are not intended for public distribution or screening.

The videos contain audio-visual footage of Indigenous Australian elders, leaders and communities during festivals and other events that I attended. They also contain my solo and collaborative dance improvisations in Indigenous Australian and Indian dance styles, as well as other relevant pictures and videos. While most of the audio and video content used in this thesis was recorded using my smartphone or a Sony hand-held camera, additional footage was also sourced from my colleagues and the Internet. All media sources and artistic contributors are fully cited and acknowledged in the 'Audio-visual Summary Boxes' provided in Chapters Four, Five and Six. As per Indigenous Australian protocols, I have included a written warning that the thesis videos may contain the images and voices of deceased persons.

Over thirty-four hours of film taken for the purposes of this research were condensed into approximately forty-five minutes of edited video. I used the iMovie program to edit the collective audio-visual material. Although this software does not have editing features as advanced as those of other programs, it was sufficient to recreate, reflect and reprise performative memories and experiences, which is the primary creative aim of this thesis. The technical limitations further revealed the layers of a 'visual rhythm' that interlinked the narratives.

Footage was primarily selected based on its ability to build on and enhance the autoethnographic narratives and philosophical views expressed in Chapters Four, Five and Six. The arrangement of the audio-visual material was linked by the stylised titles and transitions available in the software. While the speed and resolution of selected footage were adjusted, all special effects were kept to a minimum so as to not deflect or distract the viewer from the basic themes and narratives of the dancescaples. This combined process of recording, collating, creatively directing and finally editing the audio-visual material presented itself as a further valuable source of learning about and re-viewing dancescaples, enabling me to build on, deconstruct, interpret, learn and ultimately *replay* performances to other audiences during the course of the thesis project.

In hindsight, the conceptual framework of dancescaples finds another voice through these 'visual' editing processes, engendering ongoing learning that in turn reveals layers of symbolism and significance through the integration of audio and visual material. Thus, the use

of visual media transcends as well as archives moments in time and space, further reflecting the non-linear traits of the dancescapes.

Having detailed the key research methods, the following section summarises the overarching conceptual framework of the ‘dancescape’ and its inherent quality of ‘dialoguing’ as being an equally important research method.

‘Dancescapes in Dialogue’

At one level, the primary subject and vision of this creative thesis is an exploration of the nuances of dance and performative dialogue. Thus, it forms the main topic of study; namely, Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes in dialogue. At the same time, the concept of ‘dancescapes in dialogue’ is an amalgamation of several research methods, making it a multi-source analytic device grounded in a practice-led mode of inquiry that investigates dance knowledges using ‘the visual’ and autoethnographic methods. Ultimately, it is an adaptive research device that remains open to alternate methods of study suited to re-searching and unearthing the complexities of the dance medium.

Through this multi-source research method and visualisation of ‘dancescapes in dialogue’, this thesis has systematically interpreted and analysed the ontological foundations of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices. This underlying framework and the investigation of the research questions are set out in a series of standard text-based chapters in the first half of the thesis, followed by the visual chapters containing videos of the dancescapes in dialogue along with explanatory reflections.

Thesis Narrative

Chapters One, Two and Three elaborate on the ‘same but different’ cultural aspects of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practice and histories. The traditional worldviews and cultural ideals that connect the Indigenous peoples of Australia and India to their homelands and to each other are discussed and analysed in detail. The colonial disregard and ongoing misinterpretations of Indigenous cultural perspectives are also considered.

Having introduced in this introductory chapter the performative contexts, concepts, methodological framework, and research questions and hypotheses of this research, Chapter

Two presents a broader account of the early foreign influences and colonial impacts upon Indigenous Australian dance cultures. The multidimensional nature of Indigenous histories as also being bodily practice and experience (Hokari 2011) and the rise of Indigenous empowerment and the reinvigoration of traditional worldviews via dance are also discussed.

Chapter Three provides a glimpse into Indian classical dance histories by drawing attention to its ancient roots in the performing arts scripture, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Modernity and globalisation are argued to have only shifted the visual interface of Indian classical dance and its 'traditions', which continue to embody Vedic worldviews within their movement ontologies.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the autoethnographic narratives, as expressed through both written text and video. These chapters focus on how my Indian classical dance practice and perspectives altered due to 'meeting' and dialoguing with Indigenous Australian dance cultures. They present the emerging insights and implications of that dialoguing.

Chapter Four highlights the internal shifts that occurred during my initial visit in 2011 to Arnhem Land, NT. The chapter recounts the affinity I felt between the Indigenous Australian and Indian classical movement vocabularies, which resulted in a personal and performative re-viewing and re-learning of 'speaking to the land' (Patrick 2015) via striking my feet upon the earth. Traditional worldviews of dancing upon, for and about country—not just as a physical landscape but as a sentient home—are examined (Harding 2010; Hokari 2011; Ingold 2011). The effect of these ideas on my performative consciousness is innovatively explored in the video, 'An Awakening'—the first of five videos comprising the creative component of this thesis.

Chapter Five documents an ongoing exchange and meeting of 'same but different' metaphysical philosophies engaged in both Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices. These inspired insights and performative shifts generated the following video dancescapings:

1. A solo performance of the Bharatanatyam item *Nartana Gaṇapati* in the Lajamanu community, NT, explored through my Warlpiri skin identity, *Nungarrayi*.

2. Rehearsing for the Indian 'semi-classical' dance *Premanjali* for the Swan Festival of Lights 2013, where Jampijimpa's worldviews of 'speaking to the land' alter how I think, feel and embody the metaphysical.
3. My return to the Garma Festival 2014 in Gulkula, NT, where the spontaneous acknowledging of the sentient earth through the *thatti kumbidal* (Indian classical dance ritual/homage paid to Mother Earth), dance vocabularies, their metaphysical origins and sentient landscapes appear as analogous phenomena.

These three performative encounters are dialogically recounted through the video, 'Engaging and Exploring from Within'.

Chapter Six examines how Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance movements and choreographies can be innovatively dialogued to 'create art'. The improvised exchange of movements, music, rhythms, techniques and other artistic implements between various Indigenous artists and myself are presented via the following videos:

1. 'Dialoguing Traditions'
2. 'Engaging Dancescapes with Curtis Taylor'
3. 'A Dialogue in South Perth'.

Chapter Seven presents the research conclusions. Drawing together the text and video research, this chapter argues that there is a deep resonance in the movement vocabularies and techniques engaged across diverse expressions of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance. These affinities are apparent in the practice and philosophies of *Nr̥tta* (pure dance) and reveal the 'same but different' traditional worldviews of speaking and listening to the sentient earth. The thesis further highlights the strong connection between the emergence of peoples, cultures and metaphysical relationships upon and with the 'shared soil' of Gondwanaland. The theoretical construct of *abhinaya* is then presented as an ontological and analytic guide applicable to both Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices. Through its unearthing of Indigenous movement ontology, this thesis thus extends on Sklar's 'five premises for a culturally sensitive approach to dance'. In its conclusion, the chapter presents the multi-source research method and vision of 'dancescapes in dialogue' as an original contribution to dance pedagogy.

Chapter Two

Dancing Histories—Indigenous Australia

This chapter highlights some of the events that have shaped and influenced Indigenous Australian dance practices over the past few centuries. First, the concepts of 'dance' and Indigenous Australian perspectives of 'history' are discussed. Following this, the shifts to Indigenous performative domains caused by early foreign encounters and the subsequent British colonisation of Australia are explained. The chapter then describes the rise of Indigenous contemporary dance and its ability to empower and generate Indigenous cultural knowledges.

Perspectives of Dance

Dance is...

Spontaneous and planned expressions of the body in motion are perceived as integral to our human evolution (Grau 1983; Hanna 1979; Philp 2001). These corporeal articulations were thought to embody and stimulate mental, emotional, spiritual and other ineffable ideas and insights among our early human ancestors (Cane 2013; Lewis-Williams 2002; Subrahmanyam 2003). From an anthropological and psychological perspective, the beginnings of dance are associated with spontaneous responses to the natural environment (Hanna 1979, 52). The transformation of 'idiosyncratic motor reflexes ... into patterned movements for the individual and group' were seen as dance (Hanna 1979, 52). Thus, the 'roots of our humanity, and our subsequent cultural evolution' are inseparable from the early practice of dance (Grau 1983, 30) and from the experienced world. This suggests that many of our ancestors may have intuitively comprehended that,

every subatomic particle not only performs an energy dance, but also is an energy dance; a pulsating process of creation and destruction. Different particles develop different patterns in their dance ... not only matter, but also the void, participates in the cosmic dance, creating and destroying energy patterns without end. ... a continual dance of creation and destruction involving the whole cosmos; the basis of all existence of all natural phenomena. (Capra 1991, 87)

Perhaps it is through such a vision that many Indigenous cultures arguably embrace the view that nature and the creative forces engage in the phenomenon of dance—an idea that is as old as the universe itself.

The age-old premise of dance and the countless expressions of performativity that have come into practice have resulted in equally diverse interpretations and definitions of this art. Visualised as 'intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of non-verbal body movements' involving 'sight, sound, touch, smell, and kinesthetic feeling', Hanna (1995, 323) describes dance as a multisensory experience that simultaneously utilises the right and left sides of the human brain. One of the pioneers of contemporary western modes of dance,

Martha Graham describes dance as the ‘hidden language of the soul, of the body’ (Graham 1985). Renowned Malaysian dancer and choreographer Umesh Shetty (2012, 1) describes dance as ‘the joy of spirit/soul expressed through the mind and body’, while dance anthropologist Joann Kealiinohomoku (quoted in Hanna 1979, 22) argues that it is ‘a transient mode of expression performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space’.

These descriptions of dance echo Sheets-Johnstone (2014, 260), who argues that the ‘perceptual awarenesses of movement exist not only in various circumstances pertaining to one’s own movement alone but in the broader context of oneself among others’. Therefore the temporal nature of dance and the social and metaphysical awareness it creates are arguably relative to one’s unique experience of the art. As Grau (2011, 18) warns, while ‘in some instances our corporeality, spatiality and sensibility overlap ... the ways we perceive these, and conceptualize and talk about them are certainly not identical’. She further suggests that the assumption of ‘universality in our sensorial worlds close[s] doors’ (18).

It is important to understand the particularities of different cultural frames for dance. This includes the unique experiences generated via corporeal movements, as well as the collective worldviews of performativity engaged among the world’s different Indigenous cultures. In its various forms, dance is integral to the deep-felt relationships between individuals, communities and the sentient cosmos. This arguably delineates dance as a vehicle that retraces, revives and re-presents the histories of places and peoples.

The body corporeal can therefore be perceived as a navigational tool that at once explores and expounds Indigenous histories via the subconscious layers of *feeling* and *thinking*, and ultimately ‘being and becoming’ (Swami Shantanand 1979b; Yunupingu quoted in Corn 2009), where histories are expressed as the body ‘senses and feels the history’ (Hokari 2011, 93).

Indigenous Perspectives of History

The concept of ‘history’ embraced by most Indigenous Australian cultures and societies is far more sophisticated than its dictionary definition of ‘the study of past events, particularly in human affairs’ (*Oxford Dictionaries* 2019). The countless Indigenous cosmologies and significant stories that relate ancestral actions and events are not limited to only ‘human affairs’, but also incorporate non-human beings and spirits. Further, Indigenous concepts of

time are not restricted by lineal dates and chronologies whereby the past is rooted in memories and emotions. For many Indigenous Australian cultures and societies,

the past is represented in orientational terms, according to the body of the speaker. It is not a case of past/behind us, but past/in front of us. The deep past is akin to 'in front, before'. The logic is explicit: you can actually see the past, not the future, which is out of sight, behind us. Astrophysicists say the same thing; they can see stars and galaxies of the deep past in present time. (McGrath 2015, 4)

Therefore, Indigenous histories embrace the view that even though an event took place long ago, its charge and agency remains equally active in the present and into the future (Hokari 2011; McGrath and Jebb 2015). Indigenous cosmologies and histories are not bound by lineal views of time nor tangible measures of space. This is seen in the concept of 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming',¹ which is 'not simply a designation of historical events with great religious significance' but 'something directly experienced as it is encountered in the present; an encounter between a life and its very existential animation as a life within history, society, ecology, body and knowledge' (Curkpatrick 2013, 69).

In the beginning was the movement, and the movement was with the Dreaming, and the movement was Dreaming. Movement was with Dreaming in the beginning. Through the movement all things were made; without movement nothing was made that has been made. (Hokari 2011, 103)²

¹ The word 'Dreamtime', initially used by F. Gillen in the late nineteenth century, is based on the Aranda word *Alcheringa*, and is a generic term referring to a primordial period of creativity (Dean 1996, 3) among various Indigenous Australian cultures. During this time, the Ancestors travelled the country and the cosmos, often merging or transforming into various parts of the natural country. The associated term 'Dreaming' often relates to the Ancestral agency that remains accessible today through ceremony, land ownership, dance, ritual songlines and so on. For example, Indigenous people may refer to a dance or song that came to them as a 'Dreaming'.

² Hokari (2011, 103-4) relates Gurundji cosmology by rephrasing the Biblical passage (John 1) that states: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

This all-embracing worldview comes with a responsibility that goes beyond rudimentary concepts of ecology and the environment. As Jampijimpa (2015, 120) elegantly articulated:

Country is expressing itself all the time. All around Australia, Indigenous people, culture and art express (in various forms) what animals, plants and the elements, including weather and the seasons themselves—look like and speak like. How they tell history stories and knowledge that becomes history. This is how culture teaches us and cultivates us, as the soil is cultivated, and as if we are its cultivators. Who is the gardener ultimately and who is the garden?

Jampijimpa highlights that the ‘knowledges and histories of country are in forms that have been called songlines, dances, paintings, petroglyphs, engravings and artefacts’ (120). This suggests that the Indigenous Australian ways of learning historical facts involve experiential encounters:

In this schema, specific places, people and landscapes are living archival repositories. They are not open access, for the level of revelation depends upon an individual’s relationship to place, age, gender and their level of authority in the community. Through different methods reconnecting with sites—including moments of physically being there, and of walking the ground, and through story, song, dance and ritual, people in the present keep place, spirit and ancestral memory alive. (McGrath 2015, 6)

Dreaming and Dreamtime can therefore never be stories of the past, but are an ‘ever-present’ actuality that co-exists ‘everywhere’ and ‘everywhen’ (Hokari 2011, 80). Through the lens of dance, a ‘co-presence’ (Tamisari 2000) of ancestral agency occurs through the modality of movement expression. The ‘Dreaming’ of dances and the dancing of ‘Dreams’ are interrelated with the omnipresent Dreamtime: a cultural practice and framework that does not differentiate the geography of the Earth as independent from human and non-human beings, and that never disassociates the corporeal from the metaphysical (Hokari 2011, 97).

[Herein], [t]ime is multi-layered and mutable. ... The nature of this 'long ago past' stretches time beyond short timeframes. It is matched by narratives, in art and other enactments, that give prominence to the connectedness between human and other living beings, and in which the earth itself is a living force. (McGrath 2015, 6)

Hence Dreaming and Dreamtime form the corpus of an 'Earth law' (Hokari 2011) that emanates from, as well as culminates upon, sacred landscapes. In specific relation to dance, the retelling of histories evokes memories and sentiments of people, events and places that are re-presented through the body corporeal. Elaborating on the corporeal practice and engagement of history perceived by Gurundji peoples, Hokari (2011, 93–94) proposes the following:

Whoever you may be as an individual, you see the history. You listen to the history. Your body senses and feels the history. You remember history by listening, seeing and sharing. And you practice history by remembering and performing. You use your body by listening, seeing, visiting, performing, sharing, sitting, moving and interacting. ... historical practice is a bodily work. It is a lived experience.

Dance as a human experience and means of expression can thus be understood as a vital language of multi-sited encounters, and of the movements and choreographies engaged in Indigenous ceremonial spaces that were once performed by the ancestral beings themselves (Biddle 2006; Magowan 2005; Tamisari 2000, 2005). Such dances do not just mirror the ancestral gait, gestures or footprints through performativity, but are corporeally charged actions that mediate ancestral consciousness or 'co-presence' (Tamisari 2000). Flexion, shuffling, striking, swaying, sweeping and other stylised gestures are the kinesthetic ways by which one *speaks* to the country—itself a living and breathing entity that, when tread upon, is never regarded as 'static or inert ground that simply provides a platform for the dancing' (Biddle 2006, 19).

For many generations, the important transmission of Indigenous Australian dance practice, alongside music, visual designs and sacred objects, has been learned through keen observation

of and participation in ritual and ceremonial activities. Such knowledges are gained by children through the context of daily life as they see their elders and relatives perform. This learning context is informed by collective ontologies that speak to the nature of the relationships between people, land and spirit, and so are bound by certain cultural protocols. For example, many Indigenous Australian communities observe rules around who can and cannot perform particular dances, especially those that are considered secret and sacred. Thus, the education in and performance of any particular dance or movement vocabulary may be determined by the performers' gender, age and complex kinship roles; the responsibilities attached to performance; and the knowledge and initiation status of individuals.

The semiotic spheres of dance are also pregnant in the vast body of country, waiting to be 'dreamed' and realised through 'a complex synaesthesia in which the song text evokes movement rather than sounds, the visual becomes musical in the dance and the musical becomes pictorial in the designs and choreographies' (Dufrenne, quoted in Tamisari 2005, 52). Dance is therefore a crucial method of interacting and learning about country *from* the country itself—when you 'speak to the land the land will speak back' (Patrick 2015, 124). In a very real way 'land is the history. People are the history. You can see, listen, touch and feel the history through your physical interaction with memories of places' (Hokari 2011, 99). From this perspective, dance ontologically facilitates Indigenous cosmologies through ceremonial and ritual activities, whereby Dreamtime ancestors are invoked, 'presenced and re-presenced' (Magowan 2005, 68) as histories expressed via the physical body. Through the incessant movement and mobility of the Dreaming, Indigenous Australian performative realms continue to explore and embrace cultural and artistic fervour.

The following section illuminates how early cross-cultural encounters catalysed innovative shifts in various Indigenous Australian dance practices, while maintaining the traditional worldviews described above.

Indigenous Australian Dance

Early Performative Encounters

Centuries before the British colonisation of Australia, the Indigenous people in the northern parts of the continent had forged multiple cross-cultural relationships with foreigners (Corn 2009; Clark and May 2013; Langton et al. 2011). These relationships are remembered and reflected in oral histories, cultural practices and the diverse modes of Indigenous Australian performativity. For example, Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land, NT, had strong social and economic ties with Macassan seafarers, who made annual visits to the mainland in search of *trepang* (sea cucumber) to trade to foreign markets, such as China (Clark and May 2013; Langton 2011). These 'relationships through marriage, trade and friendship' (Langton 2011, 29) dated back to 'at least the 1700s' (Clark and May 2013, 1).

The Macassan influence on the arts is especially visible among the Yolŋu, whose repertoires of song, dance and bark paintings draw on this significant period in history (Graham 2006; Clark and May 2013, 59–60; Corn 2009, 13; Langton 2011, 41).³ These memories are deeply entrenched and demonstrate that 'Yolngu have long engaged in contact with outsiders without surrender or colonisation' (Macknight 2013, 64).⁴ Research in archaeology⁵ and genetics⁶ continues to reveal details of this early cross-cultural relationship, which continued until 1906

³ In a similar fashion, even though 'the people in modern day southern Sulawesi may know little about Aboriginal peoples, there are folk songs which celebrate epic voyages to Marege', or mainland Australia (Langton 2011, 41).

⁴ It is important to note that while there are 'ample indications of violent conflicts in [Yolŋu] ... myths and in the historical record ... the Macassan contact is now so long ago that there are no eyewitnesses left and it has become remembered as a period of trade and exchange without compulsion; in contradistinction to British colonisation' (Macknight 2013, 64).

⁵ Taçon and May (2013, 136) argue that 'new, important insights into the nature of cross-cultural contact during the past few hundred years are likely to emerge' due to hundreds of rock art sites across the Wellington Range (Arnhem Land, NT) being undocumented.

⁶ For example, recent genetic research (Martins et al. 2012) into the presence of Michado-Jacobsen's disease, a hereditary neurodegenerative condition among Indigenous communities in north-eastern Australia, concluded that its presence is as old as the Joseph-derived lineage that originated more than 6,000 years ago, and can be found in India, Thailand, Cambodia and Korea in Asia. Michado-Jacobsen's disease is in a 'family' of neurodegenerative diseases that includes Huntington's disease. The spread of the disease to Arnhem Land was, before February 2012, attributed to the sixteenth-century trading and exploration activities of Portuguese sailors. It was thought transmission occurred through intermarriage between the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land and the Macassan people of Indonesia, who in turn traded with the Portuguese. However, in February 2012, research was published that effectively ruled out a Portuguese link, and instead pointed to a direct and ancient Chinese link, based on an international DNA haplotyping study.

when the Australian Government's started to impose heavy taxes upon the Macassan seafarers (Clark and May 2013, 7).⁷

Another significant encounter predating the arrival of the Macassans concerns the mysterious Bayini, 'widely believed to be a mythical group of white or golden-coloured Asian seafarers' (Clark and May 2013, 4).⁸ Narratives of the Bayini are found in Yolŋu cosmologies and oral histories, and are articulated through dances, songs and ceremonies (Corn 2009; Clark and May 2013).⁹

The influence of the performative styles of Papuan, Pacific and Torres Strait Islanders can be seen on mainland Indigenous communities on the Cape York Peninsula, Far North Queensland. The frequent cross-cultural contact between these groups resulted in an innovative fusion between mainland and 'Islander'-style instruments, decorations, sacred objects (Elkin 1979, 205) and dance (Graham 2006; MacDougall 1980).

More recently, genetic research has suggested another early foreign encounter in Australia: that a group of Indians arrived on the mainland more than four millennia ago (Pugach et al. 2013).¹⁰ This thesis investigates the metaphorical and symbolic implications of this possible cross-cultural contact by examining numerous ontological and epistemological affinities between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices. These resonances are analysed in more detail from Chapter Four onwards.

It is well documented that these early cross-cultural encounters introduced new material culture, technologies and trade to Indigenous Australian societies, which they readily adapted, with sometimes considerable repercussions for their socioeconomic domains. Pre-British interactions between foreigners and Indigenous Australians also left cultural and aesthetic

⁷ Macknight, quoted in Clark and May (2013, 22), indicates that the last-known Macassan *prau* (boat), the *Bunga Ejaya*, arrived in Australia's NT 'for the 1906-7 season'.

⁸ Clark and May (2013, 4-5) highlight that while the Bayini remain important to Yolŋu culture and cosmology, the identity of these foreigners has been questioned by scholars in the past few decades.

⁹ See McIntosh, quoted in Clark and May (2013, 95-105), who also mentions the golden-skinned Bayini, who remain central to Yolŋu cosmologies and histories. The late Mandawuy Yunupingu shares his views of the Bayini, who are mentioned in the Yolŋu songlines (Corn 2009, 32-3).

¹⁰ Citing this genetic discovery, Taçon and May (2013, 136) consider that further exploration of older rock art in Arnhem Land, NT, may possibly reveal more information regarding early contact between Indigenous Australians and Asians.

imprints. These memories are reflected in various expressions of dance, art, song and ceremonial practices. Extensive documentation in oral histories, supported by information gathered through archaeological and genetic research, evidences the well-established ties that Indigenous Australians had with foreigners for many generations and which have influenced their performative practices. These early forms of cultural exchange and dialogue appear to have occurred in ways that contributed to, rather than undermined, the maintenance of Indigenous worldviews. This trend was abruptly ended when the British arrived on the shores of New South Wales (NSW) in 1788, triggering arguably the most dramatic performative shift for Indigenous Australian societies.

Arrival of the Empire

With the arrival of the British, age-old Indigenous customs and practices were threatened by rapid colonial invasion:

The traumatic experience of first contact should not be under-estimated. The first Europeans, almost all over the Continent, were regarded as returning spirits of the dead—perhaps frightening and even to some extent unpredictable, but at least beings who could be fitted into the local scheme of things ... [however] this image of them did not last long. (Berndt and Berndt 1999, 492)

As the numbers of European settlers increased, so too did the death toll of Indigenous people, resulting in the extinction of countless traditions that mediated ancient beliefs and art forms (Bates 1992; Berndt and Berndt 1999; Reynolds 2013):

The killing of mature men and the kidnapping of young women and children disrupted a society governed by complex rules and kinship obligations. The custodians of law and rich oral culture were gone. Sacred objects were stolen by marauding white men and artefacts destroyed. Coupled with the loss of land and sovereignty, it was the perfect formula for destruction. (Childs 2013, 43)

The violence was not only to Indigenous people and their lifestyles, but also to their lands. Their 'water-holes were despoiled; the ecological domain of indigenous flora and fauna was

rapidly transformed by intensive grazing’ (Bell 2002, 41). As time passed, the British colonial encounter caused conflict and dislocation, repressing the traditional identities of many Indigenous Australians and fuelled the loss of language and family connections (Berndt and Berndt 1999; Reynolds 2013; Stock and Dyson 2006). Nevertheless, despite the catastrophic changes experienced by Indigenous people, cultural expressions of dance, music, song and other arts continued in many areas to afford a critical medium by which groups could persist (often clandestinely) in expressing their traditional cosmologies and ontologies (Bates 1992; Berndt et al. 1978; de Garis 1993; Hassell 1975).

Early Accounts of Dance

Details of various Indigenous cultural customs and traditions were often penned in the personal journals and diaries of early colonial settlers. None of these writings paid serious attention to the aspects of dance, although they frequently witnessed it as a part of public ceremonies. These performances were commonly referred to as ‘corroborees’; a term derived from *carib-berie*, belonging to the Indigenous people of Port Jackson (Hunter, quoted in Clunies Ross 1986, 232). The generalisation of this term resulted in almost all Indigenous Australian ‘ceremonies and rituals and entertainments involving singing and dancing, and social effervescence’ being described as corroborees (Berndt and Berndt 1999, 381). For example, having observed a performance at Mt Barker in 1844, W A Cawthorne wrote:

The principal distinction in this play was—a most wonderful stamping of their legs simultaneously they would jump about & then turn around—sing and beat time with their spears and wittas—all at the same time & then all would at one particular part of the song stamp their right foot down on the ground & then give two or 3 turns round & down would come the left foot—Oh with unparalleled effect—Really it made me involuntarily cheer them—Away with all your dances & French steps—Balls & such nonsense, they are nothing to be compared with a Corrobberie. (quoted in Parsons 2002, 18)

Not all early settlers and travellers were able to appreciate, let alone comprehend, the philosophical aspects of the Indigenous performative encounters to which they were privy. While some described the awe and spectacle of dance performances, others romanticised

these events, sometimes drawing parallels between them and European ballets and operas (Parsons 2002, 18–20). The great majority of ‘early observers described, but misunderstood, dancing and dramatic performances, reflecting their own cultural backgrounds and prejudices’ (de Garis 1993, 22–23). Accounts of Indigenous dances were written predominantly by male European authors, and often ‘stressed the non-active participation of the women’ (25). However, such views have been contested by more recent research, which has confirmed that Indigenous women had their own forms of dance, often performed at discrete rituals and ceremonies that men were forbidden to witness (25).¹¹

The social evolutionist paradigms prevailing in Britain and Europe at the time also tainted early colonial perceptions of Indigenous dance as ‘savage’ and ‘ludicrous’. Though not always the case, these observations were often grounded in culturally biased thought, conditioned by ‘the superiority of the white to the black races’, leading ‘to assumptions of the inferiority’ of Indigenous cultural practices (Clunies Ross 1986, 232). This in turn led to European observers infantilising Indigenous dances, and overgeneralising their analyses of performative expressions essential to the ceremonial domain.

It was difficult for Europeans of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and indeed remains so for many still today, to appreciate that Aboriginal hunter-gatherers, whose material culture seemed to them so primitive, had a sophisticated artistic life, not to speak of one of the most complex systems of social organization in the world and a religious life to which the older and more privileged members of society devoted a great deal of their time. (Clunies Ross 1986, 232)

Early settler memoirs that indicate the centrality of dance and music in amongst Indigenous Australian societies also highlight the frequency of these customs and rituals that were also performed in collaboration with neighbouring Indigenous communities (Hassall 1975; Mulvaney and Green 1992; Parsons 2002). While these traditional ‘corroborees’ were not

¹¹ Anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry (1970) suggests that these dances were hidden away from those who came to visit or ‘study’ them and their communities. See also Bell (2002), Mackinlay (2000), Henry (2000) and Rose (2000) for deeper insight into the Indigenous Australian women’s cultural and traditional views of dance practice.

homogenous, they evidently represented the collective consciousness of Indigenous peoples' histories and intimate associations with their homelands across the continent.

Commercialisation of Dance

Corroborees not only facilitated the Indigenous Australian ceremonial domain but were also considered social entertainment. These events often incorporated elements of comedy, satire and other re-enactments of 'social events, celebration of hunting prowess' and 'anything that [could] be turned into a story' for amusement (Casey 2012, 4). Alongside their ability to entertain, early secular corroborees were 'not entirely unrelated to sacred dances' (Parsons 2002, 17). Ritually significant dance patterns and song narratives were embedded in the casual display of these arts. In this way, the 'inside' and 'outside' knowledges of Indigenous traditions were implicitly present in the public performance of corroborees (Berndt and Berndt 1999, 273).

Increased interactions between settler and Indigenous cultures made way for corroborees to become fashionable in towns and cities, where they were perceived as 'theatrical entertainment'; an idea that became 'significant in both the pastoral and gold period spanning from the mid 1830s until the late 1870s' (Cahir and Clark 2010, 418). Such public corroborees were performed by Indigenous people who were simultaneously being subjugated by the laws and lifestyles of the settler culture in nineteenth-century Australia.

Corroborees were often requested by government officials and other well-to-do individuals who wished to showcase the exotic wonder and 'primitive' nature of the Australian 'native' at gala events and important commemorations (Haskins 2007, 58; Parsons 1997, 46). Ironically, corroborees purported to present 'authentic' Indigenous Australian dancers representing an untainted Indigenous culture belonging to the nation's prehistory.

Even though corroborees initiated and organised by settlers and Indigenous Australians turned into 'a widespread commercial form' of entertainment (Casey 2013, 56), they also enabled Indigenous performers to demonstrate 'their strength, vitality, high status and continued survival literally in the face of the colonizers', all while charging a fee (Casey 2013, 63). From this perspective, Indigenous performers were not solely the 'passing victims of white entrepreneurs and audiences', as they actively exercised 'their own historical practices of

performances for entertainment to engage with settler economy and assert their sovereignty' (Casey 2012, 5). As such, the popular nineteenth-century corroborees 'performed for non-Indigenous settler audiences' have been characterised as 'Australia's pre-eminent prototypical Indigenous cultural tourism product' (Parsons 2002, 14); one that is imagined to have motivated Indigenous performers due to monetary gain (Cahir and Clark 2010, 412).

Financial transactions from 'tourist'-type corroborees have been paralleled to age-old customs of the exchange and trade among Indigenous Australian societies (Casey 2013, 56; Parsons 2002, 16). However, this claim both undermines the essential nature of Indigenous cultural exchange and reciprocity, and underestimates the sociocultural and political issues faced by Indigenous Australians at the time. Further, it rests on the underlying assumption that the colonisers themselves never substantially influenced, or indeed controlled, the wider economic framework that sanctioned such performances. Moreover, the comparison made between the commercialisation of corroborees and Indigenous exchange of intellectual property assumes that the foundations of the latter were purely secular.

Indigenous performances were also negotiated within Eurocentric performative spaces that catered to dominant white settler perspectives (Magowan 2000). Therefore, while it has been argued that Indigenous Australians often controlled public corroborees (Casey 2013; Parsons 1997), it should be acknowledged that these performances were bound by rigid colonial settings. In hindsight, these early socioeconomic trends of Indigenous performances are complex, emerging as they did as a direct result of colonisation, which disrupted countless expressions of Indigenous dance and music across Australia.

Nineteenth-century observations of public corroborees, though not in-depth analyses of dance, do provide insight into a period of Indigenous dance histories. Settler accounts on public corroborees highlighted the central role of dance among Indigenous Australian cultures, while also revealing how colonial society dominated, misunderstood and undermined their significance. Eventually, the ongoing pressures of colonial rule, especially in regions where urban cities and industries emerged, led to the diminishing presence of innumerable Indigenous Australian performing arts styles (Berndt et al. 1978, 37).

Performative Shifts

Cultural practices in the northern and central regions of Australia are perceived (erroneously) as having been less affected by colonisation (Berndt et al. 1978, 37). In fact, the spread of forms of Christianity into remote regions by missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries added to the disruption to many Indigenous cultures and significantly changed performance traditions in these areas (Berndt and Berndt 1999; Corn 2009; Curkpatrick 2013; Magowan 1999).

Some missionaries were known to have shielded communities from the violent colonial frontier (Dussart 2010, 3), with the presence of both Christianity and Indigenous Australian worldviews in these communities stimulating unique collaborations (Magowan 1999). For example, in some missions, Aboriginal elders 'were quick to negotiate a dialogue with open-minded Methodists which enabled their own ceremonial traditions to be openly practiced alongside Christianity' (Corn 2009, 14). This pattern of constructive exchanges and negotiations also occurred in other remote mission communities in the presence of more progressive missionaries and European settlers.

However, the 'Christian desire to suppress heathenism' remained a dominant mindset among most missionaries (Clunies Ross 1986, 232), who, together with other colonial agents, caused the relocation of people from their original ancestral homes into centralised settlements established on the traditional lands of other Aboriginal groups. In these discrete communities, people from different Indigenous language groups and cultures were forced to live together and were often forbidden by missionaries and government officials to speak their native language or engage in cultural activities such as ceremony, dance or singing. Contravening these rules could result in serious punishment.

Although rapid shifts in Indigenous performativity occurred from colonisation onwards, the rate at which dance, music and visual arts were affected by settler cultures varied across the nation. In 'desert regions and in Arnhem Land, as in some other areas (in parts of Cape York Peninsula, for instance), traditional media remained virtually unaltered up to the mid-1940s' (Berndt et al. 1978, 37) with little intervention from government authorities. Here, dance continued as part of the ceremonies and rituals that facilitated the maintenance of Indigenous cultural affiliations to ancestral country.

The view that ‘authentic’ traditional practices prevailed in the Australian outback attracted research expeditions into various remote regions. As a result, a range of important anthropological documentation was produced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, most researchers gave little or no attention to dance per se, preferring to focus on matters of kinship, ritual, language and socioeconomic systems (Grau 1983, 26). Like most anthropological research of this period, Indigenous Australian lifestyles and worldviews were predominantly presented from male-dominant, non-Indigenous perspectives.

This marginalisation of dance may be explained by the predominant European lens that saw dance and other arts as luxuries; that is, as ‘something one can indulge in once the “real” problem of getting a living has been solved’(Grau 1983, 26). This elitist approach contributed to reducing the perceived significance of Indigenous Australian dance practices. Where notes on dance practices *were* written, they were often conveyed in ‘an educated English prose style’ (Clunies Ross 1986, 234) that overlooked or omitted the significant philosophies engaged and embedded within these dances.

Alongside the sparse written documentation of dance, several ethnographic films exist¹² from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Leigh 2014), which provide valuable glimpses of Indigenous Australian dance forms. While it is unlikely that the non-Indigenous Australian filmmakers and audiences of the time could have analysed and interpreted the dances they recorded and watched, the footage now makes space for other responses to arise from the modern viewers’ perspective. In this way, the documentaries provide important insight into the overall dimensions of Indigenous Australian dance vocabulary.

Mid-twentieth-century literature on Indigenous Australian dance sheds greater light on dance’s range, vitality and role within ceremonies and rituals (Bates 1992; Dean and Carell 1955). However, these accounts continued to romanticise Indigenous Australians and their culture, with descriptions of the ‘primitive’ body ‘sinuous and flexible, glistening in the firelight’

¹² The first of these was ‘AC Haddon’s use of a cinematograph on the Cambridge University Expedition to the Torres Straits in 1898’, where the locals and Indigenous Australians visiting from Queensland were captured on film (Leigh 2014). Baldwin Spencer also filmed during his expeditions, including near Alice Springs in 1901 and Bathurst Island, NT, in 1911–12. Other ethnographic films include TJ West’s *Aborigines of Victoria* (1913); William Jackson’s *Chez les Sauvages Australiens* (1917), shot in the Kimberleys; and Frank Hurley’s *Pearls and Savages* (1921).

(Bates 1992, 37). The narratives, though detailed, were often occupied with notions of Indigenous dance as beyond compare to western entertainment:

He began by pacing in a stylized walk, moving up and down, crouching lower and lower as the atmosphere grew tighter with the increasing tempo. His arms stretched out behind him like the ripple of a wake in the water following the silent half-submerged crocodile. Suddenly, one leg shot out with great vehemence, and his body swivelled about turning away from it in a sharp twist. It was the lash of the crocodile's tail. He was facing us squarely, intent but primeval, like the great amphibious monster of his mind. The complete absorption of him into the character-quality of this powerful animal was as miraculous as if the thing were actually there, waiting, staring, deadly patient. As he moved forward, we almost cringed.
(Dean and Carell 1955, 79)

Adopting an ethnographic approach, the research perspectives and analyses of these writings continued to be tainted by the dominant Eurocentric biases of the time. This is evident in the seemingly genuine attempts to portray Indigenous societies by authors such as Beth Dean, Victor Carell and Daisy Bates, whose detailed accounts of ritualised dances and secret ceremonial practices from their journeys in the Australian outback (Bates 1992; Dean and Carell 1955) nevertheless revealed aspects of the intrusive colonial mentality. However, even though Dean and Bates at times completely disregarded the views of the Indigenous communities and individuals with whom they worked (Haskins 2007), their writings showed that dance remained critical to Indigenous Australian ceremonial domains in the first half of the twentieth century (Bates 1992; Dean and Carell 1995).

Perceptions of Collaboration

From the time of British colonisation, the songs and dances once exclusive to the ritual and ceremonial spheres were gradually dislocated from those contexts. In some cases, performances themselves manifested as vehicles to mirror or prioritise colonial ideals and values. Over time, such performances were stripped of their 'social and ritual logic' and repositioned by 'white' organisers as 'theatrical arts' (Magowan 2000, 311).

By the middle of the 20th century, performances from remote communities had become a common sight in the major cities of the nation. Indigenous performance was no longer relegated to ritual in the ruggedness of the outback, but the outback was being danced into people's homes on song recordings, and in formal concert venues, through collaborative projects between non-indigenous composers and indigenous performers. (Magowan 2000, 311)

Seen as performative dialogues between Indigenous and white Australians, Indigenous dance was incorporated into the project of building a sense of pride in a supposedly common national identity via the performing arts. Some perceive the resulting cross-cultural performances as the appropriation by white Australians of Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge and practice (Haebich and Taylor 2007; Haskins 2011; Magowan 2000). Others consider these artistic collaborations as having enabled 'important ... cross-cultural exchange and communication' (Casey 2011, 66), which found artistic inspiration and influence via Indigenous themes (Burridge 2002).

The national spectacle *Corroboree* 1954 is one example of what was, at that time, thought to be a culturally rich and profound artistic engagement between Indigenous Australian and European dance practices. The ballet was first performed for the inaugural arrival of Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Sydney. It was choreographed and performed by Beth Dean, who danced the lead role—that of an Indigenous boy initiate. By combining 'dance steps and movements which she had recently learnt from Indigenous dancers in central and northern Australia ... with classical and contemporary' dance genres (Haskins 2011, 23), Dean's artistic exploration of Indigenous Australian manhood and secret initiation rites was explicitly portrayed in her performance. While the tabloids sensationalised Dean's performance, there was no sense of awareness among the white organisers or audiences that the ballet had culturally misappropriated Indigenous culture and knowledge, let alone transgressed important Indigenous gender norms. As one newspaper reporter expressed, the performance had 'an uneasy feeling of mimicry, a sense of intrusion into unfamiliar and somewhat sacred ground' (Hayes, quoted in Haskins 2011, 23).

Dean herself would not have intended for *Corroboree* to cause hurt or injustice to Indigenous Australian culture and its peoples. She travelled to Australia specifically to learn more about Indigenous dance practices after listening to the anthropologist C. P. Mountford discuss notions of dance within the Indigenous ceremonial domain (Dean and Carell 1955, 2; Burrridge 2002, 81). Purely from an artistic perspective, as a dancer and choreographer, she achieved her aims: innovatively merging dance genres and experimenting across ballet, western contemporary and Indigenous Australian dance. It was undoubtedly Dean's inspired artistry that led to *Corroboree*'s critical acclaim. Nevertheless, she clearly overstepped her authority; in this case, by posing as the 'producer of authentic Aboriginal masculinity' (Haskins 2007, 57). In view of this, Haebich and Taylor (2007, 66–67) argue that:

In creating and performing Corroboree composer John Antill, choreographer/dancer Beth Dean and writer/producer Victor Carell followed modernist creative practices by exploiting so-called primitive forms in their search for innovative synergies, forms and languages of modernity.

'Dean's creative work was firmly embedded in ongoing colonial relations of domination and power' (Haebich and Taylor 2007, 74), which tied 'elite culture, hand in hand with the development of modern dance and its interest in "the primitive" in the wider western world' (Haskins 2007, 62). 'Invariably, the imperial gaze came to resonate in the structure of the performances themselves' (Magowan 2000, 311) and highlighted 'an ongoing struggle by white women to exercise power through representing and speaking for' Indigenous Australians (Haskins 2007, 55).

Another contentious stage production was 1963's *Aboriginal Theatre*, which generated mixed reactions regarding how the performance negotiated notions of Indigeneity at a time of political unrest across the nation. Even though *Aboriginal Theatre* was 'largely initiated and produced by non-Indigenous people, ... performances were to a large extent controlled by the Indigenous communities and performers' (Casey 2011, 56). The program 'included sections of ceremonies, public Dreaming stories and topical performances, intended to educate white Australia about Indigenous culture' (Casey 2011, 56). Further, in the case of the Yirrkala participants, the production tour was a means of protest against the bauxite mining that had

been sanctioned by the Australian Government on their land (Casey, 2011, 57–58). Elements of ‘fun’ through the comedy sketches and other stories arguably added ‘an important layer within productions aiming to communicate with cross cultural audiences as embodied statements that claim space for contemporary Indigenous cultures’ (Casey 2011, 54). However, this theatrical event was still promoted by the organisers as an ‘authentic’ Indigenous performance from Arnhem Land (Magowan 2000, 311).

While the performance may have genuinely sought to showcase talent from Arnhem Land, there was no recognition or identification of the cultural or dance diversity among the Indigenous groups of that region. There were performers ‘from Yirrkala, Daly River and Bathurst Island, three completely distinct language and cultural groups, yet the program was structured without distinguishing between them’ (Magowan 2000, 311). While the performances were chosen by the performers and their respective elders, the artistic direction positioned the entertainment through a ‘Western classical concert vein, with what might be regarded as a balance between solo and group items, serious and light hearted pieces’ (Magowan 2000, 311). Further,

the concert demonstrated that the organisers either had no clear understanding of the relationship between songs as they would have been performed in a ritual context, or, even if they had, the structure was of no importance to the audience in this white venue. (Magowan 2000, 311)

In retrospect, these stage productions were the ‘product of a time when public performance and consumption’ of Indigenous Australian cultures remained ‘a white-dominated enterprise’ (Haebich and Taylor 2007, 65).

The twentieth century was a challenging period for Indigenous Australian performers, whose ‘savage or exotic otherness’ was constantly in demand, and transfixed by the ‘imperial gaze’ (Magowan 2000). It was a time when ‘discrete elements of Aboriginal art were commodified into a public storehouse of ideas, symbols and motifs to be exploited for hybrid works combining Aboriginal and modernist forms’ (Haebich and Taylor 2007, 65).

The Indigenous Australian performing arts faced enormous pressure to conform to the more secularised genres of European dance, drama and theatre. Although dance together with song, music, designs and sacred objects continued to be engaged in as traditional rituals, the introduction of 'formalized Australian-European education' and 'the routinization of different work patterns' (Berndt et al. 1978, 37) altered the aesthetic frames and transmissions of Indigenous dance traditions. Simultaneously, shifts in performative expression opened up new domains in which Indigenous Australians could explore ways to re-present their philosophies, creative arts and cultural beliefs to the nation.

Dance and Indigenous Empowerment

In the 1960s and 1970s, the creative exploration of Indigenous performance practices was bolstered by the rise of broader movements to secure Indigenous political and cultural rights. For example, the rise of the 'Black Power' movement in the United States inspired the group of young Koori activists in Redfern, NSW, who would go on to initiate the establishment of the National Black Theatre in 1972. This theatre, in turn, enabled dance to be expressed and experienced as a powerful medium of Indigeneity.

During this period of Indigenous cultural resurgence in Australia, Carole Johnson, a black American dancer who was on a national tour, stayed on to contribute to the creative efflorescence taking place (Christofis 2012). Johnson identified with being a minority and facing racial prejudice, having experienced this herself in America. Her eagerness to support the cause and rights of Indigenous peoples led her to initiate 'Careers in Dance', 'the first multi-arts course of its kind' (Christofis 2012). This new learning space attracted Indigenous students, teachers and elders from remote communities, who shared their knowledge of cultural practice through dance. Johnson herself taught ballet, jazz and American modern technique (Christofis 2012, 14) as a way to develop and empower Indigenous artists. This performative environment led to the beginnings of the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA), which would grow to become NAISDA Dance College.

The birth of NAISDA in 1976 invoked a sense of Indigenous pride and recognition that was celebrated through dance from the 1970s onwards. The teaching curriculum incorporated students visiting their dance tutors in Indigenous homelands and vice versa (NAISDA 2019), facilitating collaboration within a contemporary urban space, while holding onto a traditional

vision of respecting dance and its sacred connections to country. It was through the operation of organisations such as NAISDA that 'Indigenous cultural pride led to the birth of a unique new dance form: Contemporary Australian Indigenous dance' (NAISDA 2019). This style was marked by the strong drive to articulate the Indigenous worldviews to the west. This time, the cross-cultural encounter was on Indigenous terms, and aimed at increasing awareness of Australian Indigenous identities and cultural history (Gilbert 1998).

Ethnographic Films

Alongside the innovative emergence of cross-cultural performances, there was a fear that 'tradition' was being lost. As a result, several ethnographic films were made in the early 1970s, under conditions of collaboration *with* (rather than being *about*) Indigenous people.¹³ During this period, filmmakers¹⁴ highlighted 'more contemporary subjects', revolving around how Indigenous Australians coped with modernity while continuing to perpetuate their ancestral traditions (Leigh 2014). Especially amid the 'increased bureaucratisation and the centralisation of control of Indigenous lives' (Leigh 2014), 'the filmmakers went to great lengths to provide a better vehicle for the voice of Indigenous participants', ensuring they guided the film projects and editing processes (Leigh 2014). In accordance with cultural protocols and censorship, some of these ethnographic films are restricted in their viewing.¹⁵

¹³ Such films include the 'collaboration between Essie Coffey and Martha Ansara in the making of *My Survival as an Aboriginal*', filmed in 1978; 'Alec Morgan and the Bostock brother's film *Lousy Little Sixpence*', filmed in 1983; and '*Two Laws* [filmed in] 1981, made by the Borroloola Aboriginal Community and Carolyn Strachan and Alessandro Cavadini' (Leigh 2014). However, as mentioned above, films about Indigenous Australians began as early as 1898 with AC Haddon's Cambridge University Expedition to the Torres Straits, which as the 'first use in the world of a motion picture camera in a fieldwork context and, although little of the film remains today ... the remaining few minutes are of great importance as the first moving image record of both Torres Strait Islanders' and Indigenous Australians. See Leigh (2014) for further information regarding the pioneering role of cinematography and early ethnographic films about Indigenous Australians. Leigh also outlines the broad scope and work of filmmaker Ian Dunlop, who officially made his debut in the 1950s and subsequently produced multiple ethnographic films, including *Desert People* (1967). Dunlop's *Yirrkala Film Project* (1970–1982) is seen as 'a valuable record of many aspects of the life of the Yolŋu people of Yirrkala ... shattered by the coming of the NABALCO bauxite mine, precipitating the first land rights case in Australian history' (TROVE <http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/198750804>).

¹⁴ Kim McKenzie—*Waiting for Harry* (1980); David and Judith MacDougall—*Takeover* (1980); and Ian Dunlop (Leigh 2014).

¹⁵ Access to audio-visual material of songs, artwork, dances and other cultural knowledges is dependent on a person's gender, initiation status and social group or community, as well as the rules surrounding kinship or skin systems within a particular community. As previously mentioned, these restrictions also apply to performing and/or witnessing Indigenous cultural performances.

Importantly, the films capture the dance movements, patterns and techniques at a time when elders in communities were requesting films to be made to create a visual archive for future generations. These films did not romanticise the Indigenous cultural practices of dance, music, songs and body designs, and recorded a large volume of ceremonies and rituals, both public and restricted. These films also engaged in 'real time' events, of Indigenous peoples living in their communities (Graham 2006; Dunlop 1979). As audio-visual archives, these films portray the nature and role of dance as a vehicle for maintaining ancestral connections to country. These extremely valuable and visual resources surpass any literary attempt to describe the intricate movements and philosophical foundations of Indigenous Australian dance. Shifts in dance techniques and vocabularies over time are also apparent in these films (Graham 2006).

In subsequent years, Australia witnessed the genesis of Indigenous filmmakers, who told the stories of their communities and found ways to 'reinterpret and re-incorporate the past into the present' (Leigh 2014).¹⁶

The Birth of Bangarra

Having established and cemented the role of NAISDA, Carroll Johnson initiated what was to become an internationally renowned Indigenous Australian dance troupe: Bangarra Dance Theatre.

The groundbreaking choreography and innovative performances ... has impacted on the sensibilities of audiences around the world and placed it firmly within the canon of great Australian performing arts companies. (Burridge 2002, 77)

Graduates from NAISDA who had been groomed to become trained professionals now had the opportunity to join a dance company committed to 'improving the lives of Indigenous Australians' and telling 'their stories through innovative world-class dance theatre'. The company prides itself on 'maintaining relationships with traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island elders and communities', whose 'ancient and contemporary stories, songs and dances'

¹⁶ Coral Frazer (Edwards)—*It's A Long Road Back* (1981); Wayne Barker—*Milli Milli* (1993); and also Rachel Perkins' *Jardiwarnpa* (1993), which was part of a 'four-part documentary series Blood Brothers, in which she filmed another, contemporary Warlpiri fire ceremony and compared it with the Sandall-McKenzie film made in 1977' (Leigh 2014).

influence Bangarra's creative direction and cultural ethics through 'honouring language and customs' (Bangarra' 2019).

However, 'for all the praise for innovation and creativity there have been fingers pointed over perceived cultural inauthenticity and "stagnant" movement vocabulary'. Whether this is due to 'an "overused" unvarying style of musicality' or 'a narrow pool of traditional cultural sources' (Verghis 2014) is open to debate. However, neither criticism of a repetitive style, nor Bangarra's attitude to Indigenous cultural protocols, has diminished the dance company's substantial national and global reputation.

From its beginnings as a dance workshop in NSW, Bangarra eventually grew into the contemporary Indigenous Australian dance initiatives that formed part of the highly political scene that brought Indigenous people from all walks of life together to demand their rights. Bangarra has also made way for exploration of other avenues and theatre conventions through which dance articulates strong ideals of Indigeneity.¹⁷

No longer is the fantasy of possession relegated to objects of desire in the glass cases of museums, but Bangarra dancers have inverted the propensity to possess. Unlike art objects, these indigenous dancers are not possessions to be controlled by the West, but are themselves the possessors of something that is seen as most valuable. (Magowan 2000, 317)

Contemporary Performative Spheres

While the ongoing gaze of colonialism has affected Indigenous people on their own homelands for centuries, the core values of these cultures, whether they be defined or understood as 'tradition', have re-emerged and been reinstated by Indigenous peoples through alternative modes of performativity. Today, diverse forms of traditional dance are engaged throughout Australia in both public and restricted Indigenous performative contexts. These dance

¹⁷ It is important to note that the 1970s dance scene in Australia also embraced cross-cultural themes beyond the predominant binary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, where the latter was dominated by 'white' or Anglo cultures and experiences. These cross-cultural and intercultural dance and theatre collaborations between Indigenous Australian and Asian dancers, as well as other performing and visual artists, are highlighted in Chapter Three.

practices are documented and shared through feature films, ethnographic documentaries and local television networks, such as National Indigenous Television (NITV). Dances are also popularly viewed through Internet channels such as YouTube and Vimeo and on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These mediums enable individuals to easily showcase, share and explore cultural views and artistic practices.¹⁸

Just as this age of globalisation and information technology has allowed a glimpse of the diversity of Indigenous dance practices throughout the country, so too has the creative explication and sharing of Indigenous narratives of Dreaming.¹⁹ Today, Indigenous artists, groups and cultural organisations share their histories and ongoing ties to the land through dance performances, workshops and lectures given at schools, tertiary institutions, festivals and tourism events, and other public forums.²⁰ An important foundation for these is the Indigenous ‘Welcome to Country’: an invitation from traditional owners to visitors that ‘occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English’ (Reconciliation Australia 2019). The responsibility of determining what kind of dances can be taught, choreographed, spoken about and shared in public is shared among Indigenous performers, leaders and elders alike. Such decisions and rules regarding Indigenous performativity have been reproduced for generations, and continue to be informed by kinship, gender, age, initiation status and other cultural institutions that frame creative practices. Consequently, cross-cultural creative

¹⁸ Move it Mob Style, one of the most popular series aired on local TV stations and online, is an example of the contemporary currents and explorations of ‘deadly’ and funky dance practice among Indigenous Australian and Islander youth. The program invites a range of Indigenous celebrities to share and teach a unique blend of Indigenous movement vocabulary, incorporating hip-hop and western contemporary dance practices, with the aim of encouraging viewers to participate in this exciting dance workout as a means to stay fit and healthy (‘Move It Mob Style’ 2019).

¹⁹ One such example is The Mulka Project, where a range of Yolŋu performative expressions are available online, and are also continuously played at their physical location within the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala, NT, for visitors and local community members. The project not only archives visual footage of cultural practices and performances, but also trains and encourages local staff to assist and innovatively explore visual narratives on film. The Mulka Project aims to ‘sustain and protect Yolŋu cultural knowledge in Northeast Arnhem Land under the leadership of community members. The Mulka production house and archive is managed by Yolŋu law, governance and culture’ (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre 2017).

²⁰ For example, the Wadumbah Indigenous dance group, established in 1995 by Noongar man James T Webb, is popular around Perth, WA. The performers, led by Webb, who is also known as Gumbiardi, are committed to sharing their culture for a range of events (‘Wadumbah’ 2010).

engagements around performance require a great depth of cultural awareness, receptivity and consent from the appropriate custodians of these arts.

While both NAISDA and the Bangarra Dance Theatre remain prominent in the dissemination of Indigenous Australian dance practices, a range of other non-profit organisations, together with freelance artists, also contribute to Australia's contemporary performative spheres. For example, envisioned as 'the peak body for Indigenous Dance in Australia', the collaborative environment of BlakDance comprises Indigenous elders, artists and other dance professionals committed to perpetuating Indigenous cultural practice ('BlakDance' n.d.). Integral to the foundations of BlakDance is the philosophy that all projects and activities must embrace and be guided by Indigenous cultural ways.

The creative exploration of Indigenous Australian cultural views is also central to Ochre Contemporary Dance Company, through which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian performers and choreographers collectively promote and sustain Indigenous culture in WA ('Ochre' 2019). Led by Dalisa Pigram and Rachael Swain, another dance company, Marrugeku, has similarly become a popular space for Indigenous creativity. Active in Broome, WA and Sydney, NSW, 'Marrugeku is an unparalleled presence in Australia today, dedicated to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians working together to develop new dance languages that are restless, transformative and unwavering' ('Marrugeku' 2017). In the words of Marrugeku's patron and cultural advisor, Patrick Dodson:

Marrugeku is at the global forefront of cultural expressive integrity. Their work transcends romantic representation, to represent the complex social reality of contemporary Indigenous society in a manner that confronts ever increasing audience of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Marrugeku's artistic integrity is also demonstrating their inclusiveness of Indigenous voices, advice and guidance. As cultural advisor I can strongly attest to that. ('Marrugeku' 2017)

Numerous Indigenous festivals, such as the Garma, Milpirri,²¹ and other cultural events hosted by Indigenous Australians on their home country, now provide public performative spaces imbued with a dialoguing between the 'old' with 'new'. In reference to the Laura Dance Festival and the Tjapukai Dance Theatre/Cultural Park, Henry (2000, 331) highlights that dances presented within such performative domains are critical to the 'redefining' of Indigenous peoples. Henry argues that such dances 'are an expression of social agency'; they are not just reflections of, but 'are themselves political and economic realities' (331).

Today, these performance events, though fundamentally centred on Indigenous philosophies, also introduce and fuse with other non-Indigenous performative genres. Events like Milpirri wholly embrace styles such as hip-hop, reggae, rock and other alternate types of dance and music. As noted by the creative director of Milpirri, Warlpiri elder Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick (2015, 127), there is an active creative element to such events:

We also encourage children to create their own hip hop dances based on their traditional stories. So in the festival, you will see them performing hip hop dances that are really interpretations [of] their own Dreamings.

Therefore, 'the essential values of traditional Warlpiri culture are sustainable and can be expressed in whatever lifestyle confronts one' (Patrick 2008, 57), while 'keeping in mind that there still is something we could point to, or address as tradition' (Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick, conversation with author 2014). Curkpatrick (2013, 5) captures this sentiment, noting:

Performing or recognizing something as *tradition* engages individuals with elements of the past inextricably interwoven in the present. Tradition is not something discrete but something that exists as it is brought to life through the present articulation.

Awareness of the ongoing practice of dancing upon country, and a deep acknowledgement of its performative roots as a product of Dreaming (which is intrinsically linked with country), fundamentally contributes to the perpetuation of Indigenous traditions. From this perspective, multiple expressions of Indigenous Australian dance, as outlined in this chapter, continue to

²¹ The cultural contexts of dance engaged at both the Garma and Milpirri Festivals are discussed in subsequent chapters, alongside details of my attendance of these events.

be engaged in diverse intercultural spaces. Therein, dance is integral to the ongoing interrelationships and connections between people, country and Indigenous histories. It is a powerful medium of disseminating and re-engaging the 'knowledges and histories of country'²² through performative ideas of being and becoming. Such perspectives have been maintained despite early foreign encounters, the British colonisation of Indigenous homelands, and the ongoing intercultural and global impacts of the twenty-first century.

While the First Peoples of Australia continue to fight for sovereignty, their worldviews of performance are predominantly misunderstood and misinterpreted by the multicultural and transnational residents of this country. Australia in the twenty-first century remains deeply affected by binaries between Indigenous and white Australians. Importantly, immigrants and other settlers have hardly been a part of the creative journey between Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation, despite the fact that many diasporic citizens can relate strongly to notions of colonialism and imperialism, which may have affected the lives of their own ancestors and homelands. The lack of creative engagement with and exploration of these cultural resonances itself appears to be framed by an underlying colonial psyche. Could efforts to imbibe performative exchange between Indigenous traditional systems globally empower innate states of colonialism that exist in this contemporary world? It is with this view and motivation that this thesis envisions and initiates intercultural dance dialogue and exchange from the perspective of an Indian classical dancer in the diaspora. However, before divulging the creative encounters of dancescapes, the following chapter outlines the cultural background, historical roots and traditional worldviews of Indian classical dance.

²² Cited earlier in this chapter, Patrick (2015, 120) refers not only to dance, but also to 'songlines, ... paintings, petroglyphs, engravings and artefacts' as 'expressions' of country.

Chapter Three

Histories—Indian Classical Dance

Chapter Three presents an overview of India's classical dance history, beginning with a discussion on 'Hinduism' or *Sanātana Dharma*, how the *ṛṣis* (seers) disseminated their knowledge of universal truths via countless *śāstras* (scriptures)—which became the founding pillars of Hinduism in ancient India—and the role and concept of the 'guru'. The origins of *Nāṭya* (dance, drama and music combined) and the concept of *Nṛtta* (pure dance) as per Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* are then described, followed by a discussion of the regional evolution of these performance expressions. The impact on temple dance traditions during the rise and fall of different kingdoms and foreign invasions are then examined. The decline of the southern dance practice, *Sadir*, and its rebranding as the 'classical' dance genre, Bharatanatyam, is then outlined, before highlighting the creative renewal of these dance traditions in India and in the increasingly global diaspora.

The chapter concludes by acknowledging various cross-cultural collaborations between Indian and Indigenous Australian artists, to introduce the subsequent thesis chapters, which expand on similar dancescapescapes in dialogue.

Knowledge, History and Truth

Sanātana Dharma

The etymology of the term ‘Hinduism’ is linked to early Persian travellers who referred to the native civilisation by the river Sindhu as the ‘Hindus’ (Swami Sivananda 1999, 4). Unlike other religions, there is neither a founder nor date ascribed to the beginnings of Hinduism. The name given to the diverse sociocultural ideas and ethos that developed over unknown epochs in India is *Sanātana Dharma*—‘eternal law’ (Swami Shantanand 2015). The Sanskrit terms *dharma* refers to ‘law’ or ‘duty’ and *sanātana* means ‘eternal’ but also refers to that which is ‘ancient and yet ever-fresh and ever-new’. These diverse modes of worship, ceremony and meditation techniques resonate in their collective embrace of absolute bliss—truth—reality (Swami Shantanand 1978). Through this unity in diversity, Hinduism today is perceived as ‘a fellowship of faiths’ and also ‘a federation of philosophies’ catered for people of different temperaments, from different walks of life (Swami Sivananda 1999, 83–84). The multiple aspects of *dharma* (laws/duties) practiced by Hindus today continue to reiterate the pan-Indian wisdom that emerged from ancient *Bhārata*¹ (India). The spiritual, intellectual and philosophical foundations of *Sanātana Dharma*, or Hinduism, are attributed to the ancestral seers of India—the *ṛṣis*.²

For many Hindus, India’s historical timeline begins with the deep penance and ritual activities of the *ṛṣis* (Swami Shantanand Saraswati, conversation with author 2000).³ Their intuitive insights and realisations of truth were the seeds of the *Dharmic* traditions that have flourished in India and southeast Asia. Envisioned as ‘perfect beings ... some of the very greatest of them were women’ (Swami Vivekananda 1983). ‘Their aim was illumination, not logical conviction, their ideal the inspired seer, not the accurate reasoner’ (Sri Aurobindo 1998, 10). The seers collectively described ‘truth’ as an overarching, supreme ‘oneness’—a luminous consciousness

¹ ‘*Bhārata*’ is associated with Bharata, one of the greatest rulers of the country, and the suffix *varṣa* translates to ‘continent’. There are also several other names for India, such as *Āryāvarta* (‘the whole central region between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains’, (Swami Sivananda 1999, 4) and *Jambūdvīpa*, referring to the entire subcontinent.

² The Sanskrit name *ṛṣi* derives from *driṣ*, ‘to see’.

³ India is made up of diverse non-Hindu and non-religious cultures and societies that have their own histories and artistic practices. However, these are not examined in this thesis that explores present forms of Indian classical dance practice that are ontologically linked to Vedic-Hindu philosophies.

identified as *Para Brahman* or the *Paramātmā* (Swami Shantanand 1978; Swami Sivananda 1999; Swami Vivekananda 1983). Thus they declared: *ekaṃ sāt viprā bahudhā vadanti* [Truth is one; sages call it by various names] (Swami Sivananda 1999, 84). Similarly, innumerable saints and sages have shared their views of life, god and the universe and have contributed to the diverse spiritual approaches and doctrines of *Sanātana Dharma*, or Hinduism.

Over time, the *ṛṣis* disseminated their secular and spiritual knowledge of histories, cosmologies, various branches of philosophy, metaphysics, ancestral genealogies and other topics via countless *śāstras*, or sacred scriptures. Among these are the Vedas, or bodies of ‘knowledge’.

Śāstras—Sacred Scriptures

The Vedas are prominent among the Hindu *śāstras*. These were revealed to *ṛṣis* through direct ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’.⁴ Adhering to the Vedas or Vedic ways was known as *Vaidika Dharma*, the ‘Path of Wisdom’ (Swami Shantanand 2015), which is yet another name for *Sanātana Dharma*, or Hinduism (Swami Sivananda 1999).

‘The language of Veda itself is *Śruti* ... a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite’ (Sri Aurobindo 1998, 10).⁵ The *ṛṣis* were merely conduits of this broad suppository of wisdom and never considered these scriptures their own. They believed that whatever they had intuitively encountered had always been and would continue to remain in the ether, indicating that these

⁴ The Sanskrit term Veda, or ‘knowledge’, derives from the root word Vid, ‘to know’. The Sanskrit words ‘dṛṣṭi and śruti, sight and hearing, are Vedic expressions; these cognate words signify in the esoteric terminology of the hymns, revelatory knowledge and the contents of inspiration’ (Sri Aurobindo 1998, 10). There are four Vedas; namely *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Atharva*. While the Vedas were revealed to different sages over time, their collective compilation is attributed to sage Vyāsa, or Vyāsa Maḥarṣi (Sri Aurobindo 1998; Swami Shantanand Saraswati 1978; Swami Sivananda Saraswati 1999). This great sage-author, who also wrote the famous epic, the Mahabharata and within it, the Bhagavadgita, was the son of a seer and a fisherwoman, and thereby known as Kṛṣṇa Dvaiparāyana, or the ‘dark-skinned one’ who was ‘born on the isle’.

There is an ongoing debate among scholars about whether the Vedas and Vedic worldviews find their roots in an Aryan race. The personal view of this thesis aligns with Sri Aurobindo (1998), Swami Vivekananda (1893), Swami Sivananda (1999) and Swami Shantanand (1989), who consider that no such Aryan race invaded India and that the Sanskrit term ‘Aryan’, or ‘noble’, refers to the Indigenous civilisations in India who turned to the religious paths laid out by the Vedas. More critically, Malhotra (2011) argues it is through the misleading interpretations of the ‘northern’ Aryan that western European scholars have continually claimed India’s Indigenous wealth as their own, perpetuating an ongoing colonial gaze.

⁵ The *ṛṣis*, who intuitively witnessed these knowledges ‘that ranged beyond mankind’s ordinary perceptions and daily activities’, ‘had acquired them by a progressive self-culture’ wherein there was ‘no suggestion of the miraculous or the supernatural’ (Sri Aurobindo 1998, 10).

bodies of knowledge could be repeatedly re-discovered by those seeking answers about their existence in the world. In this respect,

the Vedas do not owe their authority to any one. They are themselves the authority as they are eternal. ... They are without beginning and end. ... The Vedas are not the utterances of persons. They are not the composition of any human mind. They were never written, never created. They are eternal and impersonal. The date of the Vedas has never been fixed. It can never be fixed. ... Vedas are an embodiment of divine knowledge. The books may be destroyed, but the knowledge cannot be destroyed. (Swami Sivananda 1999, 8)⁶

Proclaimed through the Vedas is the view that ‘life is not a by-product of matter but an independent principle which uses matter as a medium to express itself’.⁷ So too for the existence of an ‘all-knowing intelligence’ (Swami Shantanand 2015), ‘which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world [and] manifests itself in our inner beings as consciousness; and there is no break in unity’ (Tagore 1998, 16). In this way, the ancestral seers perceived absolute truth and reality as *tat tvam asi* [Thou art that].⁸ As such, the entire scope of the Vedic hymns reflect the *advaita*, or non-dualistic philosophy, which negates any difference between the *jīvātāmā* and *paramātmā*—the individual and supreme soul consciousness, respectively.⁹

While the Vedas are regarded as *Śruti*—knowledge revealed via ‘hearing’—and so hold a special place in Hinduism, the *Smṛitis*, *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* are also important foundations of traditional knowledge (Swami Shantanand 1978).¹⁰ The *Smṛitis* are supplementary scriptures

⁶ This statement by Swami Sivananda can be paralleled to Warlpiri elder Steve Wantarri Jampijinpa Patrick’s view that knowledges and histories are archived in the living and sentient country and are not lost or destroyed but are waiting for people to ‘hunt’ for them and ‘dig [them] up’.

⁷ They fundamentally asked how, where, when and by whom did the entire creation come into existence, and further inquired ‘what is meant by the terms when, what, how, where and whom?’ (Swami Shantanand 2015).

⁸ This famous Vedic statement is from the *Chandogya Upanishad* of the *Sama Veda*.

⁹ While the saint Adi Sankaracarya propagated that the Vedas are imbued with non-dualistic views of metaphysics, Hindu saints such as Sri Ramana Maharishi, Swami Sivananda, Swami Shantananda and numerous others have echoed the non-dualistic philosophies through both Adi Sankaracarya’s teachings and their own.

¹⁰ Swami Sivanananda (1999, 18-22) details numerous other scriptural classifications such as the *Āgamas* *Darśanas* and other types of treatises including secular works.

that interpret the ‘ritualistic injunctions’ of the Vedas and determine the ‘sacred law-codes’ and obligations at all levels of Hindu society (Swami Sivananda 1999, 11–13). These scriptures, based on the Vedas, acknowledged the changing trends and issues in society and altered the law-codes accordingly (12).¹¹ The *Itihāsas*¹² and *Purāṇas*¹³ are also considered seminal scriptures that embody Vedic ideas, but they are not as complex in their prose and content. These works seamlessly integrate both *purākalpa*, or ‘past’ events (Malhotra 2011, 65), and esoteric mythologies layered in cultural, philosophical and metaphysical significance (Swami Shantanand 1978). The revelation of these sacred scriptures that were ‘realised by the sages in their hearts were passed on by word of mouth, generation after generation’ (Swami Shantanand 2015). This method of knowledge transmission from the guru’s mouth to the *śiṣyas*, the disciples’, ears is known as the *Karṇa Paramparā* (Kandasamy 2008, 4) and the educational commune in which this teaching occurs is referred to as the *Gurukulam*.¹⁴

The ‘Dispeller of Ignorance’

gurur-brahmā gurur-viṣṇur gurur-devo maheśvaraḥ guruḥ-sākṣāt paraṃ
brahma tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ... *Prostrations to the revered Guru, who*

¹¹ ‘There are eighteen main Smritis or Dharma Sastras’ (memoirs of India’s sacred laws) that have been explicated ‘by sages of different ages and different parts of India’ (Swami Sivananda 1999, 11-2).

¹² The sage-authors Valmiki and Vyāsa (also the compiler of the Vedas) wrote two of the most popular *Itihāsas*; namely, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, respectively. The famous conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is a part of the *Mahabharata*.

¹³ The *Purāṇas* give an account of the history of humanity and the cosmos through the *Pañcalakṣaṇa*, or five distinct features. These include:

1. The cosmogony, or *Sarga*
2. Secondary creation, or *Pratisarga* (cosmology)
3. The genealogy, or *Vaṃśa*, of divinities, sages and kings
4. The details of each *Manvantara*, or the ongoing cycles of the cosmos (the cyclical process of creation, preservation and dissolution of life/matter), together with the multiple names of humanity’s progenitors during each cosmic cycle
5. The distinct narrative of events relating the stories of royalty and patriarchs, known as *Vaṃśānucarita*. (Swami Sivananda 1999)

There are eighteen major *Purāṇas* and eighteen minor *Purāṇas* that detail the life stories, events and lineages of people, places and metaphysical beings across a broad spectrum of time, embracing both linear and non-linear ideas of time.

¹⁴ The suffix *kulam* translates to ‘school’ or ‘community’; hence, *Gurukulam* is the physical vicinity in which the learning takes place between teachers and students. When a child turned eight years of age, he or she was sent to their Guru, also referred to as *acarya*, where they resided for at least twelve years, during which time they were trained in the allied arts and sciences (Swami Shantanand 2015b, 156). The famous Hindu icons Rama and Krishna attended *Gurukulam* to master the 64 arts and sciences.

is himself the gods Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara,¹⁵ and who is verily the visible Supreme Absolute Itself [italics in the original]. (Ramachandran 2014, 10)

The guru plays a significant role within the Vedic-Hindu worldview. When the guru is a saint, or *sanyāsin*—one who has spiritually renounced the material world and belongings, they wear ochre robes, representing the primordial form of the guru as *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*—an incarnation of Śiva. From this perspective, the guru’s form and identity is paralleled to Śiva—a deity whose movements and actions are perceived as the metaphysical personification of the cosmos (Capra 1991; Coomaraswamy 2009). Therefore, the ‘indwelling presence of every atom in the universe’ (Swami Shantanand 1983) can be acquainted with (the) ‘guru’—the remover of ignorance. This is because, when one sincerely enters the path of inquiry, the transmission of knowledge is perceived as deriving from the absolute truth and consciousness of the cosmos.

‘While “Guru” may be used for teachers of all sorts ... it is as spiritual teacher that the term carries the greatest weight and has passed over into English usage’ (Narayan 1989, 82). Thus, the guru is no ordinary teacher or facilitator of knowledge; in Sanskrit, *gu* refers to ‘ignorance’ and *ru* is to ‘remove’, hence the guru is one who assists his or her disciple in the removal of ignorance (Narayan 1989). The guru can also take the form of nature, creative forces and other cosmic entities, as encountered by the foremost gurus in ancient India, *Dhattātreyā*.¹⁶ The following conversation between Professor Kirin Narayan and her guru (Narayan 1989, 86–87), whom she refers to as ‘Swamiji’, reflects these deep philosophical ideas of the guru:

Swamiji: The entire universe is the Guru. Wherever you tread, you should continue to find the Guru. Every second. Whatever you do, find a Guru in it. When you think over something, ‘Why is it like that?’ that act of reflection is the Guru. You can gain some wisdom from everything, so the entire universe is the Guru. We learn each thing from this universe, don’t we? That’s why it should be saluted as the Guru.

¹⁵ Maheśvara, broken down as *maha* (great) *īśvaraḥ* (ruler) is another name for the Hindu icon Śiva (Ramachandran 2014, 10).

¹⁶ Swami Sivananda’s description of Dhattatreyā—his birth, life and the 24 Gurus that influenced his path—can be retrieved from <http://www.dlshq.org/religions/dattatreyā.htm>.

Kirin: So the Guru is not one person?

Swamiji: That's what I think. Dattatreya [Guru of the Gods] made twenty-four Gurus. He learned something from each one of them. He even made a prostitute his Guru, a dog his Guru. Look how honest and faithful a dog is—if you feed it a bit of bread it doesn't forget you. A human being should be like this, too. That's why Dattatreya made a dog one of his Gurus.

Further, the 'guru' is not just a person or thing, it is also a 'process' (Swami Shantanand Saraswati, conversation with author 1997) whereby one realises the path from and 'between the world of illusions and the ultimate reality' (Narayan 1989, 82). This vision of reality is imagined as the omnipresent and omnipotent awareness, *Para Brahman*; 'Who is the silent Witness of all minds, Who is the Indweller in all beings, Who has projected this world for His own *Lila* or sport, Who is the support for this world, body and mind and all movements, and Who is the foundation for all societies and their activities' (Swami Sivananda 1999, 1). These heightened spiritual realisations manifest within one's self rather than appearing externally.

These non-dualistic perceptions of 'self' and the universe—Vedic ideas about microcosm and the macrocosm, respectively—became increasingly difficult to comprehend for the layperson. Even the words of the Vedic seers were easily misinterpreted and misunderstood, giving rise to India's sociocultural divisions (Swami Shantanand 1989).¹⁷ However, an alternate path towards spiritual liberation was revealed through Bharatamuni's¹⁸ *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a scripture on dance, music, theatre, stage-craft and other aspects of dramaturgy. His work explicated Vedic

¹⁷ The misinterpretations of the four classes of society as stated in the Vedas is one such example. The *ṛṣis* had mentioned that people were divided into four main *varnas*, or colours. These were not defined by genealogy or status, but by the 'colour of one's mind' (Swami Shantanand 1989). These four *varnas* were the pure-minded *Brahmans*—the 'priests, ministers or philosophers who guided kings or rulers' (Swami Sivananda 1999, 31); the *Kshatriyas*—'warriors or men of action' who protected the wellbeing of their peoples; the *Vaisyas*—the economists and traders of society; and the *Shudras*—the group that was fit to serve society, considered the labour class. A fifth classification of caste, the *parayas*, referred to the mindset of those individuals who were below the four given classifications. These social distinctions were not made based on genealogies or the complexion of one's skin (Malhotra 2011; Sri Aurobindo 1998; Swami Shantanand 1989). Rather, the Vedas perceived the *Varnas* as the 'colour' of one's inherent character (Swami Sivananda 1999). Indeed, it is widely known that the compiler of the Vedas, Vyasa Mahārṣi, was himself born to a fisherwoman and a seer. Similarly, the author of the famous epic *Ramayana*, Valmiki, was once a notorious thief.

¹⁸ Although 'Bharata' is the given name of the author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, he is often addressed as Bharatamuni or Bharata muni, with the suffix *muni* (sage) added to his name. The author is also referred to as Bharata ṛṣi.

traditions in a more comprehensible and engaging format through codifying *Nāṭya* (dance, drama and music). Moreover, Bharatamuni's work was accessible to people from all sects of society. For many classical dancers today, Bharatamuni is venerated as the foremost guru of India's ancient dramaturgical practice. The sage-author's seminal work is also perceived as the foundation from which all branches of Indian performing arts have developed over the millennia (Swami Shantanand 1989; Subrahmanyam 2003; Vatsyayan 1997a).

The following sections provide an overview of Indian classical dance history and its links to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the 'pure dance' aspect of *Nṛtta* as expounded by Bharatamuni.

Indian Classical Dance

The *Nāṭyaśāstra*

Among the *Dharmic* paths, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s extensive vocabulary of dance, music and drama embodied the essence of the four Vedas. The result was an

easily assimilable Science of Theatre and Dance where, by mere entertainment, the relaxed audience is fed the ambrosia of Vedic truths in a delectable manner. Without even them realising, the bitter medicine of Vedanta, abstruse philosophy, morals and ethics are fed to them, through the sugar coating of Puranic¹⁹ lore and colourful stage presentation of music, dance and drama. (Kandasamy 2008, 1–2)

While the dates ascribed to the treatise remain debated by numerous scholars, the general consensus is that Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* was penned onto palm leaves somewhere between 500 BC and AD 500 (Subrahmanyam 2003, 6). However, Subrahmanyam's detailed research of the sacred text suggests it was written well before 1500 BC (6).

¹⁹ As previously stated, the *purāṇa* refers to the category of Hindu scriptures that relates oral histories, cosmologies, cosmogonies, astronomy, astrology, linguistics, geography, Ancestry and lineages, as well as a range of other topics.

According to the scripture, the inception of *Nāṭya* was as recourse for the decreasing moral behaviours among people on Earth. Bharatamuni relates how the demi-god Indra asks Brahma, the creator of the cosmos, if he could produce an art that was accessible to all humanity:

‘Let it be so’, said he in reply and then having dismissed the king of gods (Indra) he resorted to yoga ... and recalled to mind the four Vedas.²⁰ ... He then thought: ‘I shall make a fifth Veda’. (Bharatamuni 1967, 3)

For this reason, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is also called the *pañcama* (fifth) or *Nāṭya* Veda (Bharatamuni 1967, 3). It substantiates the four main ‘objectives of life’; ‘namely, Dharma (righteous codes), Artha (wealth), Kāma (desire) and Mokṣa (liberation) (Subrahmanyam 2003, 20).²¹ The fundamental purpose of *Nāṭya* is to invoke *rasa*, or ‘the enjoyment of an aesthetic bliss derived through witnessing or reading a production’ (32). *Mudras* (hand gestures) and *asanas* (bodily postures), choreography and distinct movement vocabularies were pivotal in ceremonies and rituals, as they enabled performers to transcend the mundane and transform ‘at least momentarily ... into a macrocosmic being, experiencing within herself a sense of unlimited freedom and bliss’ (Vatsyayan 1997b, 39).

The *Nāṭyaśāstra*’s performative ‘spheres of feeling, culture, emotions, senses, and the body and its capacity of expression’ (Vatsyayan 1997b, 40) created ‘a system wherein the very language of “name and form” (*nāma* and *rūpa*) evoke[d] that which is beyond form or without form (*parārūpa* and *ārūpa*)’ (39). Performers engaged ‘a diminutive cosmos (a microcosm) to evoke the experience of the macrocosm’ (40).

²⁰ Brahma extracted the elements of *pāṭhya* (recitation), *abhinaya* (mode of communication), *gānaṃ* (music) and *rasa* (aesthetic response/experience) from the *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Atharva* Vedas respectively.

²¹ The birth of *Nāṭya* as recounted by Bharatamuni takes place in the first chapter of the treatise. Here, it is stated that soon after Brahma revealed the knowledge, Bharatamuni was given the task of codifying and presenting the newly devised *Nāṭya* for an upcoming festival in the celestial region. The inaugural performance of *Nāṭya* was in commemoration of Lord Indra’s banner. However, it was disrupted by the *daityas* (demons), who were also invited. They were not impressed by the reprisal of a past event that portrayed their defeat. While the first few chapters of the treatise describe these events, including the architectural details of different performance venues and the ritual oblations required for the protection of these venues, it is the fourth chapter of the treatise that highlights the concept of *Nṛtta*, or ‘pure dance’ vocabulary. Here, Bharatamuni describes events taking place after his troupe presented two choreographies of *Nāṭya* in the presence of Lord Śiva himself. It is said that upon witnessing these, Śiva was reminded of his own dance and wished to send his foremost pupil, Tāndu, to teach the components of *Nṛtta* to Bharatamuni, so that he could add it to the existing syllabus of *Nāṭya*, as a way of enhancing its aesthetic demeanour.

Perceived as ‘the very sub-stratum of the artistic living tradition’, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* ‘governed the laws of aesthetics’ in ancient India (Subrahmanyam 2003, 1). While the voluminous treatise of thirty-six chapters²² is replete with technical specifications and codifications of *Nāṭya*, its practice was never meant to be a static recreation of performance. Bharatamuni (1967, 238) himself suggests that *Nāṭya* may be altered according to the temperament of audiences. Thus, the Indian performing arts naturally mirrored the sociocultural, political and religious views that governed different parts of the country. Artistic practices collectively ‘subscribed to the basic principles of the’ *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Vatsyayan 1997a, 7).²³

While ‘dance was only a part of drama in ancient India ... drama itself was mostly danced’ (Subrahmanyam 2003, 32). Emotions, ideas, themes and more were enhanced through *Nṛtta* or ‘pure dance’ movement vocabulary. Bharatamuni writes about this dance form in the fourth chapter of his treatise titled *Tāṇḍava Lakṣanam*.

Nṛtta

Essential to *Nṛtta* are the *Karaṇas*, the ‘basic unit of dance’ (Subrahmanyam 2003, 51), of which there are 108 detailed in Bharatamuni’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The *Karaṇas* are defined by Bharatamuni as ‘Hastapadasamayogah Nṛttasya Karanam Bhavet’, which translates as meaning that ‘a combined movement of hands and feet in dance’ gives rise to a *Karaṇa* (61). These basic steps are perceived as the nucleus or ‘life’ of *Nṛtta* (86),²⁴ and their movements mirror the kinesthetic features of the natural world. Animals, insects, plants and other elements and creative forces find form and expression via numerous techniques and movement vocabularies (Subrahmanyam 1979, 2003). According to Bharatamuni, *Nṛtta*’s codified syllabus emerged well before *Nāṭya*, with lord Śiva described as the progenitor of this ‘pure dance’ form.

While the history of *Nṛtta* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* appears straightforward, it is layered in esotericism. For those familiar with Vedic and Hindu philosophies, it is clear that Śiva’s *Nṛtta*

²² The range of topics covered in these chapters includes ‘theatre architecture, acting, costuming, makeup, properties, dance, music, play construction, poetic composition, grammar, composition of theatre companies, audiences, dramatic competitions, the actor community, and ritual observances, to name the more important’ (Richmond, Swann and Zarrilli 1993, 35).

²³ From this perspective, there is considerable similarity between Indigenous Australian and Indian dance expressions in this balancing of tradition with culturally legitimised creativity and innovation.

²⁴ See Subrahmanyam (2003) for an in-depth understanding of the history, deep conceptual and theoretical underpinnings, permutations and combinations and choreographic traits of Bharatamuni’s *Nṛtta Karaṇas*.

predates *Nāṭya*, due to the worldview that this deity represents, on one level, the kinetic dimensions and forces of the cosmos. For millennia, the *ṛṣis* have poetically described Śiva as the cosmic dancer and the dance; a vision cemented through Śiva's image as *Nataraja*, or King of Dance, which among other concepts represents the eternal cycle of creation and destruction in the universe. It is with this philosophical understanding that the early-twentieth-century philosopher and author Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (2009, 80) says,

In the night of Brahma, Nature is inert, and cannot dance till Shiva wills it: He rises from His rapture, and dancing sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sound, and lo! Matter also dances appearing as a glory round about Him. Dancing, He sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still dancing, he destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest. This is poetry; but none the less, science.

For physicist and systems theorist Fritjof Capra (1991, 272), Śiva's dance encapsulates 'the dance of subatomic matter':²⁵

As in Hindu mythology [or rather oral histories], it is a continual dance of creation and destruction involving the whole cosmos; the basis of all existence and of all natural phenomena. Hundreds of years ago, Indian artists created visual images of dancing Shivas in a beautiful series of bronzes. In our time, physicists have used the most advanced technology to portray the patterns of the cosmic dance.

Therefore, in addition to Bharatamuni's instructions that *Nṛtta* enhances the production of *Nāṭya*, its deep associations with Śiva highlight the meditative aspects of this dance form. It is for this reason that *Nṛtta* is also considered *yoga*—the method by which the individual and universal consciousness unite (Swami Shantanand 1989). From this perspective, the creative engagement of *Nṛtta* can potentially alter performers' states of awareness. This process of

²⁵ Acclaimed author and educator Fritjof Capra is also the founding director of the Berkeley-based Center for Ecoliteracy.

training the body ‘only to be forgotten about’ (Subrahmanyam 1979, 44) reflects the Vedic idea of *advaita* or non-dualism .

However, *Nṛtta* was not merely a performative vocabulary and technique per se. Bharatamuni declares that those who perform *Nṛtta* shall ‘arrive’ at Śiva’s abode (Bharatamuni 1967, 75), revealing an important aspect of India’s ancient performative worldview, in which dance emerged and is continually linked with that which is beyond the human realm. These age-old philosophical and spiritual lenses evidently led to the perpetuation of *Nṛtta* on the sacred sites and ritualistic domains of Hindu temples.

Dancing in Temples

Countless images of dance emerged on the walls of temples across the Indian subcontinent (Vatsyayan 1997a, 5). The most significant amongst these were Bharatamuni’s explication of the *Nṛtta Karaṇas* (4).²⁶ Considered visual teaching guides (Kulendran 2004, 89), the presence of this dance vocabulary in temples reveals the importance given to *Nṛtta* in a society where its practice was integral to one’s spiritual evolution (Subrahmanyam 2003). This was a time when dance was considered ‘most pleasing to the Gods ... the highest form of worship’ (Sarabhai 2000, 1) and when people collectively witnessed ritually charged performances at the temples’ *Nāṭya sabha* (assembly halls) and *rangamandapa* (theatres) (18).

Multiple forms of divinity were celebrated through artists’ re-enactment of important oral histories and inspired narratives. The performances were predominantly led by the ‘servants of the gods’, known as the *Devadāsīs* (*deva*—god; *dāsi*—female servant).²⁷ These artists who were ‘attached to temple were granted land and subsistence through royal patronage’ (Chatterjea 2009, 127).²⁸ From around 2nd century BC to approximately 14th century AD, India

²⁶ Subrahmanyam (2003, 106-200) examines the *Karaṇas* in the temples of Tanjavur, Kumbakonam, Chidambaram, Tiruvanamalai, and Vriddhacalam, located in Tamil Nadu, India. She also details the discovery of *Karaṇas* in the Prambanan temple, Indonesia (219-234).

²⁷ The term *Devadāsi* is one amongst many names given to the female dancers whose lives were ritually integrated with the temple. Khokar (2002, 16-7) reiterates that through their ‘exalted status and role in society’ the *Devadāsīs* formed ‘a community – not a caste’ that gained tremendous momentum during the Chola reign. Records reveal that King Rajaraja Cholan recruited more than four hundred dancers for the Brihadeswar Temple in Tanjavur (Tanjore), Tamil Nadu (Kulendran 2004).

²⁸ Chatterjea (2009, 127) highlights that the *Devadāsi* system in Bengal ‘existed prior to the Malla dynasty, certainly during the rule of the Pala dynasty (eighth–twelfth century) and the Sena dynasty (eleventh–twelfth century).

encountered a golden era where kings and other rulers advocated the nation's cultural and spiritual heritage through dance (Vatsyayan 1997a, 6-7). Hindu temples were not only designed as places of worship, but also the rich socio-political, economic and cultural epicentres of pre-colonial India (Swami Shantanand 1989).

Sadly, adherence to the dramaturgical principles of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* 'came to be forgotten by the Indians of the north from 12th century and those of the south after the 14th century' (Subrahmanyam 2003, 1). India's shifting 'political, religious, sociological and economic' circumstances eventually changed the disciplined approach and 'systematic study of its precepts' (1).

This did not mean that the underlying ontologies disappeared altogether. The 'classical' conventions of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, referred to as *mārga* (Subrahmanyam 2003, 1), continued to be practiced throughout India and gave rise to a range of regional dance and theatre traditions (Vatsyayan 1997a). Though seemingly different, most of these 'classical' dance traditions 'retained or concentrated on the isolated aspects'²⁹ of Bharatamuni's performing arts practice (Subrahmanyam 1979, 34). From this perspective, the apparent diversity in movement vocabularies perpetuated in dance styles throughout India 'reveals a basic unity' that 'can be explained against the backdrop of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*' (34).

The Vedic worldviews and theatrical principles embraced in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* were similarly expounded in numerous performance-related manuscripts (Vatsyayan 1997a, 4-7).³⁰ These written works guided artists in their performance endeavours, while capturing the dramaturgical mindset that governed different parts of the Indian subcontinent at different points of history. In this way, the natural flow and compass of artistic development in India reflected the ancient beliefs and traditions of its predecessors. However, the ongoing strife

²⁹ Subrahmanyam (1979, 34-6) describes her own experience of these classical movement vocabularies.

³⁰ Nandikeśvara's (2006) *Abhinayadarpana* and Abhinava Gupta's commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, entitled *Abhinava Bharati*, are some of the popular Sanskrit works that acknowledge and relate to the earlier performative traditions expounded in Bharatamuni's treatise. The Tamil treatise on dance, *Koothanool*, written by Sathanar, may also have been influential in South Indian societies. Interestingly, both the *Koothanool* and *Nāṭyaśāstra* reflect similar ideologies, such as *Nṛtta* and the 108 movements associated with this dance genre. In addition, these works continue to perceive Śiva as the progenitor of dance. As such, they embrace common cultural perceptions that were incorporated into performative practices; namely, preliminary rites, gestures, syllabus and the dialogical idea of *rasa*.

between local rulers and the arrival of foreign powers invariably resulted in the transformation and decline of temple dance traditions (Prahlad 2004; Vatsyayan 1997a; Venkataraman and Pasricha 2002; Viswanathan 1991).

Foreign Impact and Influences

The collapse of the Chola empire in the Thirteenth century and the disintegration of their lands led to increased political tensions in the south of India (Viswanathan 1991, 57). Ongoing battles between native rulers ensued for the next hundred years. 'The clashing forces were those of Pandyas and Hoysala in the South, and of the Kakatiyas and Yadavas in the North. This turbulent period coincided with the first raid and invasion by Muslim forces' (Kersenboom 2011, 24).³¹ The 'plundering and destruction of the temples ... brought about a decline in the royal patronage to the arts and forced musicians and dancers into other vocations' (Prahald 2004, 18). This bleak period of almost fifty years led many dancers into extreme poverty (Viswanathan 1991, 58).

Fortunately, the temple arts and culture were restored with the rise of the Vijayanagara empire that uprooted the Muslim occupation of Madurai (Viswanathan 1991, 58).³² 'For the first time, the entire South was united under one central rule which facilitated mutual exchange' (Kersenboom 2011, 38). These defendants of Hindu culture reinstated the glory of the southern Indian temple dancers and their performance traditions (Prahlad 2004, 18).³³ The *Devadāsīs* who were looked up to as *Nityasumaṅgalī*—'ever auspicious' were once again 'held in high esteem in all layers of cultural expression'(Kersenboom 2011, 38). Under the Vijayanagara rule, the sacred performative ideals of temple culture were protected from the Muslim Sultanates located in the north, for almost two centuries.

³¹ Malik Kafur and his forces looted and destroyed main temple and sacred shrines of Madurai (Viswanathan 1991, 57). The Ma'bar Sultanate, also known as Madurai Sultanate occupied the city of Madurai and its nearby territories. Muslim invasions in other regions south of India resulted in the 'massacre of Hindus and the destruction of Hindu culture' (Kersenboom 2011, 31).

³² King Kampana of the Vijayanagara empire who reclaimed Madurai from the Sultanate, 'established an orderly government and appointed many chiefs (Nayakkanmars) for inspection and supervision so that the worship in all temples might be revived as of old' (Viswanathan 1991, 58).

³³ Referring to the written accounts of the Portuguese merchant traveller, Domingo Paes, Viswanathan (1991, 58-9) provides insight into the *Devadāsīs* dance and culture during Vijayanagara rule. However, his perception of the *Devadāsīs* themselves is 'predictably exoticized' and eroticised (Hubel 2013, 162).

While Muslim invasions in north India had already influenced the dance culture of this region from the tenth century (Khokar 2004, 7), it was the arrival of the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century that significantly altered the cultural reception and technique to the performing arts (Vatsyayan 1997a, 84).³⁴ Dances increasingly infused the Mughal 'court etiquette' and 'mannerisms' into performance repertoires (Khokar 2004, 7). Traditional dances that ventured into Muslim courts 'had to become more entertaining and less religious'(Sarabhai 2000, 11).³⁵ These were the beginnings of Kathak – a 'classical' dance practice that originated with the *Kathakas* (storytellers) of north India (11-2). Its performative form embraced the culture and the aesthetics of the Mughal and Rajasthan courts, as well as the countless compositions of poet-saints that inspired north India (Vatsyayan 1997a, 84-8; Venkataraman and Pasricha 2002, 45).³⁶

Back in the south, the collapse of the Vijayanagara empire in the sixteenth century invited another eminent era of dance and music under the Nayak of Madurai and Tanjavur (Venkataraman and Pasricha 2002, 15). Artists flocked to these centres that were beaming with creative energy and generous patronage (Prahlaad 2004, 19; Viswanathan 1991, 61).³⁷ It is also during the Nayak reign that the role and image of the *Devadāsi* was effectively blurred with the *Rājadāsi* (servant of kings). This *Devadāsi*-courtesan 'appears as a distinct cultural

³⁴ The dance vocabulary 'prevalent in north India was akin to the Bharatanatyam or Orissi' and it continued to proliferate in temples till around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' (Vatsyayan 1997a, 84). However the 'establishment of a state religion' that was formed by the Mughal empire impeded the existing cultural views of 'dance as a form of worship' resulting in the complete dissolution of dance sculptures in temples (84).

³⁵ Complex rhythmic footwork, spins and choreographies that particularly pertained to Mughal culture influenced the exiting dance traditions. The transition of these dances into the court were effectively captured in countless mural and miniature paintings that reveal the gradual shifts in movement vocabularies, techniques and costumes (Vatsyayan 1997a, 84-6).

³⁶ The vast body of literature, songs and poetry composed by poet-saints in and around the twelfth century is attributed to the movement driven by *Bhakti* or devotion. Many of these devotional narratives that recounted oral histories were implicitly and explicitly incorporated into the Kathak form and repertoire (Vatsyayan 1997a, 88).

³⁷ 'Raghunatha Nayak (1600-1634) was the most illustrious ruler of the dynasty. He was himself a composer, musician and musicologist' whose creative penmanship was infused with scholarly insights of Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Viswanathan 1991, 62-3). The subsequent reign of Tanjavur under Vijayaraghava Nayak witnessed the exponential thriving of dance and music compositions alongside panels of dance scholars who were also well versed in Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (65).

presence, inextricably linked to sophisticated articulations of courtly eroticism (Soneji 2013, xiv).³⁸

The establishment of Maratha rule that followed the Nayak reign in Tanjavur also generated tremendous innovation and development of dance and music. Apart from being ardent patrons of the arts, these kings composed 'lyrics and librettos' (Venkatarama and Pasricha 2002, 15). More importantly, they were critical to the aesthetic emergence of the south Indian dance form of Sadir (Vatsyayan 1997a, 23). Vast bodies of intellectual work including a codification of dance also emerged during the Maratha reign (Viswanathan 1991, 69-70).³⁹ The performative domain of the Tanjavur courts had attained an unimaginable peak by the late eighteenth century. During this time, the sons of the legendary teacher Subbaraya Nattuvanar, also known as the 'Tanjore quartet' (Khokar 2002, 23) creatively renewed the existing dance repertoires with the cultural knowledge of their predecessors in mind.⁴⁰

While these performative times were encumbered by the presence of several foreign powers throughout India, the Maratha courts continued to embrace and integrate the diverse melodies and musical instruments from these cultures. Dance performances embraced 'aspects of indigenous Tamil culture, Telugu literary material, the new Mughal-style courtly practices from Maharashtra, and the modernity of the European enlightenment' (Serfoji 2013, xv). However, the steady infiltration and power of the British deeply affected the nation's Dharmic ethos and expressions of dance. By the mid-nineteenth century, Indigenous performative domains had been altered due to the major cultural, economic and political upheavals faced during the British rule. The dispossession of Indigenous homelands disrupted the natural flow and design

³⁸ 'In their new role as artists who performed both in temple and courtly contexts, these women were also imaged as concubines, secondary wives, or even queens' at the Nayak court (Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam cited in Senjoi 2013, xiv).

³⁹ Maratha King 'Tulaja's most significant contribution to the field of music and dance history is undoubtedly the theoretical work *Sangita Saramrita*' (Viswanathan 1991, 71). The chapter on dance specifically presents the codifications of the movement vocabularies (71).

⁴⁰ The four brothers—Chinnaiah, Ponniah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu—contributed to the current *mārga* or classical dance repertoire of Bharatanatyam. These brothers continued to innovate the classical dance and music repertoires under the royal support of Maratha King Serfoji II, and subsequently under the famous Kerala King Swathi Tirunal. The latter, who was a passionate and accomplished artist, encouraged and entertained the diverse tapestry of and artistic collaboration between the various Indian performing arts.

of the traditional arts encountered in temples and royal courts, while the new colonial psyche meticulously impacted performance traditions.

The British system of education did not recognize the 'arts' as a subject of education curricula. The generation which went to the schools and colleges, founded by the British in India in the 19th Century, was thus isolated from the art traditions of the country. Temple dancing was forbidden, but the devotees of the art continued to practise it in the seclusion of their homes. (Vatsyayan 1997a, 8)

Societal judgment of *Devadāsīs* worsened as native kings and leaders increasingly faced colonial warfare (Prahlad 2004, 20). Condemnation of this particular class of performer eventually led to the degradation of their traditional arts (Peterson and Soneji 2008, 18). Dancers who once maintained the artistic heritage of their ancestors in temples and royal courts were perceived as prostitutes. Such was the case in South India, where the Sadir dance practice was legally abolished by the Madras Legislative Assembly (Subrahmanyam 2003, 49). However, with the help of lawyer and activist E. Krishna Iyer, the renowned dance guru Rukmini Devi Arundale⁴¹ reinstated the practice of *Sadir* in an altered light, calling it 'Bharatanatyam'.⁴²

This process of rebranding the traditions of southern Indian dance with a new name was considered by some as 'sanitising' an art that had for centuries embraced all types of socio-political and cultural narratives. For Rukmini Devi, 'it had been about respectability and a set of aesthetics alternative to the *devadasi* women' (Srinivasan 2009, 66). However, the de-sensualisation and innovative reconstruction of Sadir into Bharatanatyam allowed the dance style to gain acceptance and become instrumental in reintroducing Vedic values and philosophies in colonial India.

⁴¹ Guru and founder of one of India's most prestigious Bharatanatyam institutions, Kalakshetra, which is located in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

⁴² While the term Bharatanatyam was proposed in the early 1930s as a means of re-sanctifying the existing dance practices that were considered too sensuous in nature, the legal reinstatement of the dances in the South only occurred in 1947 upon India's independence from the British. However, Soneji (2010, xviii) points out that the term Bharatanatyam ('Bharata Nateya') was used in 'sixteenth-century ... masterpieces of Telegu poetry meant for courtesan performance ... to refer to dance, dispelling any doubts that the term was 'invented' in the 1930s ...'.

India's independence from the British in 1947 also gave momentum to reinvigorating the identified 'classical' dance forms of each state. Soon after this event, the nation witnessed a resurgence of talent, which flourished both within India and in the Indian diaspora. In this way, the cultivation of Indian classical dance became a pathway towards learning about Indian cultural values and oral histories.

The ... revival of interest in dance, developed as a sign of national pride in the glories of indigenous art and culture, helped the development and popularity of [India's] ... various dance styles. ... The store-house was so rich and the layer of dust so weak that the sincere artist had only to dig a little to discover its essential luminosity. ... Many layers of past artistic glory have been uncovered. The digging continues and each time one delves deeper, a greater treasure is discovered. (Vatsyayan 1997a, 8)

Concepts of 'Classical'

While Indian classical dance forms share cultural and religious views, underlying tensions also exist between the genres regarding the emergence of the 'classical'. This is in terms of both defining and defying 'authentic' ideas and expressions of India's Indigenous dance cultures. In the early to mid-twentieth century, Indian classical dance expressions were at the forefront as India gained its independence from the British. However, as Peterson and Soneji (2008, 20) note:

A centrally important element of the dance 'revival' was the foregrounding of the name 'Bharatanatyam' for the new dance, a move that disconnected the 'tradition' of dance from hereditary performers and their repertoire and practice, connecting it instead with an ancient heritage of theory and practice, posited as residing in an authoritative Sanskrit treatise from antiquity.

They go on to charge Rukmini Devi (who was instrumental in lifting the ban from the *Sadir* dance genre) as having altered the 'suggestively erotic content, gestures, and movements ... interpreting the dance in exclusively "spiritual" terms' in its revitalised form as Bharatanatyam

(Peterson and Soneji 2008, 20). A similar argument is made by Purkayastha (2014, 7), who writes:

Indian cultural reformists and revivalists, in their attempt to highlight a unique and unsullied past, resorted to meticulous research of pre-colonial, ancient texts and indigenous movement forms and refashioned a twentieth-century image of Indian dance. Yet, although having immense historical value for its careful reconstruction of the past, modern classical Indian dance had no wish to reflect upon or directly address the rather different and somewhat tumultuous socio-political scenario of colonialism that gave it birth.

The political aftermath of such events was further framed through the hierarchy of class, status and caste, all of which overlapped in the emergence of India's classical arts. With this in mind, Peterson and Soneji (2008, 7) state that the 'reinvention of a classical tradition would be the displacement of the hereditary performers and the dispersal of their communities and knowledge bases'. The rebranding of *Sadir* and other Indigenous dance genres as puritan 'classical' styles, disassociated from India's 'modern' and intercultural arts revolution, increased the tension between its practitioners.

Indigenous artistic traditions throughout India are well documented as having creative agency, with innovation alternately efflorescing and subsiding, as did periods of stricter adherence to the technical language and movement of dance. It is thus arguably misinformed to require such creative performance genres to stand still and romanticise a past, while simultaneously contributing to their stagnation. Anger on the part of dancers who believe in creative restrictions as a means to resurrect and maintain 'pure' art forms from the past is understandable. However, many artists are driven to explore and innovate within their art, without being bound by demarcations of 'authentic' performativity. From this perspective, it is important to remember that the re-emergence of *Sadir*, which had been banned in the South because of its sensual nature, occurred at a time of political unrest and uncertainty for India. In praise of her work to reclaim the inherent ideals of India's art, Kandasamy (2008, 2) explains that Rukmini Devi, 'salvaged it from disrepute by learning it and herself performing it in a

chaste and divine manner, changing its mode of presentation while retaining its vocabulary and character’.

The legacy of Rukmini Devi remains embodied through the transmission of Bharatanatyam at the famous institute that she headed in Chennai, India, known as Kalakshetra. However, her *bani* or signature performance style is just one among the myriad Bharatanatyam styles that emerged in the past few centuries. This applies to all styles of Indian classical dance genres, including those practiced by Indian nationals and by people internationally. In the context of Bharatanatyam, Kandasamy states:

Its identity has become international over time, translating and crossing world cultures, varying religions and spiritual concepts. The range of permutations and combination of themes and contexts it has taken is phenomenal. What is amazing is the re-vitalizing spirit which has made it adapt and accommodate all. (Kandasamy 2008, 2)

What Kandasamy refers to in terms of Bharatanatyam could very easily be said about all Indian classical dance genres where the basic vocabulary stays the same but adopts various narratives. For example, if a Bharatanatyam student who is not from a Hindu background chooses to perform a dance that embraces her religious or philosophical views, then items are usually choreographed drawing on those particular cultural perspectives. In other words, dance, in its vocabulary and in its style, is applied as a semantic tool—a language of communication that can articulate religious narratives such as dance items on Christ or Buddha as a part of the classical dance repertoire. This does not preclude the fact that the dance medium itself finds its ontological references in Hindu or Vedic worldviews.⁴³

⁴³ Malhotra (2011) argues that such adaptations of alternate religious narratives assist in the process of ‘cultural digestion’, where the ‘digestion of one culture by another is carried out under the guise of a desire to assimilate, reduce difference, and assert sameness in place of the less dominant culture’. He further states in relation to western and Dharmic cultures that, while the principles behind bringing cultures together is inherently positive, the idea of this ‘common global culture’ itself has been ‘framed in terms and structures that emerged under Western domination of the world in the past 500 years or so’ (Malhotra 2011). While Malhotra’s point does highlight the ongoing colonial mentality that persists within Dharmic cultural frames in modern Indian/Hindu societies, it goes against the very grain of India’s ancestral seers, who welcomed diverse paths of Dharma (duty/law), towards one’s spiritual enlightenment.

Embracing Change

Critical reception and commentary on artists' work can be one of the most challenging experiences faced by performers and choreographers. This is especially the case when defining performances that meander between 'classical' and 'modern' but which are claimed to be 'traditional'. Perhaps the key question is at what point do we reference these concepts upon the arts? Where is the balance between modern and traditional? Can we define these precise moments through artistic creation? Perhaps in trying to either move away or maintain 'authenticity' in the arts, we actually move away from the quintessential purpose of art; that is, to relate or *speak* to its viewers. From this perspective, incorporating diverse cultural, socio-political and religious views and sentiments is crucial to the survival of any art. Similarly, artists should not be afraid of and ignore, 'in the name of tradition', the use of modern technology to enhance their creative practices (swsav 2008a).

Evidently, dance is a kinetic expression that projects themes and ideas based on personal understandings. Therefore, art is made up of diverse encounters of events, people and places in multiple domains of time and space. The way we change as people, the way seasons change around us, the ongoing 'dance' of atomic particles—all of this informs our thinking; at some level, even innate thoughts and actions can be considered to dance. The concept of dance is universal. Whether in the form of muscular tension, spontaneous bodily movement or the humming of a tune, it is only natural to follow these kinetic instincts and nurture 'change'. Of course, this should not be done obsessively, although some performers and choreographers aim to do just that; rather, we should be aware of the shifts that take place all around us and within us, and if need be, adapt and develop our creativity in response.

As a result of colonisation, elders and gurus tend to be wary of external cultural appropriation. Certainly, it is *adharma* (unrighteous) 'when change is forced on you ... when change for other peoples' benefit is forced on you and change that harms you is forced on you' (Alfred 2015). However, in terms of art, including dance, the only way to assess whether change is appropriate for you, as an artist, performer, individual or group, is to feel a sense of connectedness through the movement, choreography and energy or emotions, and in turn consider what the viewer(s) should feel. The latter is a critical part of the formula in ancient India's dramaturgy, where the *bhāva* (performers' state of being) invokes the *rasa* (the

reciprocation or ‘taste’ of the performance). This exchange of performative consciousness remains the epitome of the Indian performing arts. However, there is a fine line between innovation and experimentation and the extent to which artists consider their environment, society and audiences, let alone perpetuate cultural knowledge. Therefore, while artistic exploration and experimentation are vital for the continued relevance and reciprocity of the arts, ‘if everybody takes to it without meaning, depth or understanding, neither tradition nor innovation will survive’ (Khokar 2002, 75).

Recalling India’s history, the past century witnessed the emergence of multiple Indian classical dance schools cultivated via the guru–*śiṣya* (student) tradition. Their collective commitment towards maintaining and sharing ancient wisdom involved the spontaneous exploration of movement vocabulary and choreography. The creative impetus of these gurus added to the evolution of the Indian classical dance paradigm,⁴⁴ and the gurus’ unique movement styles produced new waves of orthodoxy within classical performance frames. The socio-political evolution of these dance forms, and the rapid spread of classical arts in the diaspora, meant that sacred performative ontologies with their roots in the Vedas were explicated across the world.

Today there are multiple performing arts institutions and cultural organisations outside India that are committed to the training and performance of Indian classical dance practices. While modern technologies have made it easier for artists to communicate, learn and share their cultural knowledge, many students make frequent visits to their guru’s homes for intensive training sessions. Similarly, gurus and other professionals who are based in India and the diaspora travel around the world, showcasing and sharing their art and knowledge through public workshops and performances.⁴⁵ In this way, the essence of Indian culture and heritage

⁴⁴ For example, Gurus like Pandit Birju Maharaj and Sri Kelucharan Mahapatra became instrumental in disseminating the classical styles of Kathak and Odissi, respectively, in India. These gurus, together with their dance disciples, were also critical to spreading classical dance culture and knowledge around the globe.

⁴⁵ Several online forums shed light on the current events, conversations and scholarly views around Indian classical dance practice. Founded in 2000, the website of the artistic director of the Arangham Dance Theatre, Anita Ratnam’s (www.narthaki.com), facilitates conversations and disseminates articles and news regarding Indian dance activities in India and around the world. Filmmaker and dancer Ghirija Jayaraj also founded a prominent online channel (<http://shastram.com>) that is dedicated to the preservation of the cultural ideas and traditional knowledges of Indian classical dance practices. Jayaraj captures the sensation, emotions and worldviews of dancers from India and in the diaspora.

embodied and expressed via Indian classical and other dance practices continues to be nurtured through the guru–śiṣya relationship.⁴⁶

While the performative expressions of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* have changed during the course of history, it is critical to remember that Bharatamuni declared his treatise as the fifth Veda. In other words, whatever knowledge was intuitively revealed to the sage-author continues to prevail in the ether, for it is arguably imperishable. This cultural perception informs the approach of this thesis to the term ‘classical’, which through its links to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is imagined as upholding various ontologies and epistemologies in formative dance techniques and vocabularies. While this idea runs counter to those of secular-minded Indian dance scholars and professionals, this thesis is grounded in the views of Indian classical gurus, whose teachings imbibe the language of the ancient seers.

Globalisation and the Arts

The increase in globalisation and technology in the past few decades has altered the creative synergy between and approach towards Indian classical dance practices, both in India and overseas.

The rapid flow of ideas, people and technology is significantly reconfiguring politics, culture and economy, and the arts are no exception. ... Artists are experimenting with multiple forms, ranging from traditional repertoire to creating hybrid genres. The goal has now become to explore a certain cultural identity as well as look beyond it. Thus, Indian classical dances have evolved to display a complex tapestry of race, ethnicity, culture, history and mythology. ... Globalisation as a social phenomenon highlights the blurring of boundaries of culture and nation. Consequently, fusion manifests as a choreographic tool, denoting a cultural blend of disparate elements. (Banarjee 2017)

⁴⁶ Ashish Mohan Khokar’s 2017 issue of *attenDance* highlights the guru–śiṣya tradition and journey through the eyes of prominent Indian dance Gurus. Khokar’s *attenDance* is an annual publication on the dance scene in India that highlights the major events, publications and other news related to the multifaceted world of Indian dance.

The global stage has enabled artists to ‘variously blend, juxtapose or alternate between distinctive vocabularies of dance in efforts to explore the possibilities for intercultural dialogue’ (Foster 2011, 196). However, the multiple paradigms of ‘dance’ in the twenty-first century cannot be reduced to any specific order in terms of generating creativity, as performers and viewers are always bound by interlaced modes of appreciation.⁴⁷ Globalisation has resulted in creativity being less prone to cultural isolation. ‘Sensing, feeling and thinking, for example, are all part of human knowledge, and they do not operate in isolation’ (Grau 2011, 7). Therefore, ‘art’ that operates through human impulses is bound to absorb and reflect known and unknown prisms of culture. It intentionally and unintentionally carries ideas and emotions that communicate, share and influence the way people see, feel and think about all aspects of life.

While the hybrid lexicons of Indian classical dance practice are not recent innovations,⁴⁸ such inter-, trans- and cross-cultural explorations enable artists to inquire into and review their cultural ideals and position in society.⁴⁹

The experience and process imbibes, assimilates, embodies and reflects the economic, socio-political, philosophic state of science and technology, of period and region, but the creative is the embodied language of ‘symbol’ and ‘form’. Through metaphor and symbol it transcends the specificity of time, places, region, class and caste and

⁴⁷ The nature of dance practices and performance in our global era has become heavily reliant on what audiences want to see, hear or taste. Therefore, it is predominantly audience opinion that gives form and function to creative arts practices in general. Censorship, sociocultural and political discourses, audiences’ interests, and even the critiquing of creative works form a part of this cycle of creating and performing dances in this contemporary age. Showcasing choreographies of dance may be about sharing innovative and inspired pieces of work, but these arguably also remain informed by the stipulations, guidelines and expectations of performativity in various cultures and societies.

⁴⁸ For example, TFA International was already exploring intercultural themes in dance–drama productions in the 1980s. Indian classical, folk and contemporary dance and music genres were dialogued with each other and with contemporary dance, ballet, and a range of southeast Asian performance genres. Productions included adaptations of ‘Jonathan Livingstone Seagull’, ‘Swan Lake’, ‘The Legend of Mahsuri’, ‘Lady White Snake’, ‘Asean Ramayana’ and Shakespeare’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, to name few.

⁴⁹ Such artistic themes are apparent in the works of Akram Khan (London) and Umesh Shetty (Malaysia), who integrate their personal memories via Indian classical and other non-Indian dance genres. Khan’s *Desh* (Jennings 2011) and Shetty’s *Recall* (Devan 2014) are examples where mixed genres of performativity are used to reflect the artists’ personal memories and cultural views via their choreographies and in their unique corporeal expressions.

transforms trans-social context into communication. (Vatsyayan 2001, 203)

In this manner, cross-cultural modes of performativity cannot be viewed as experimental alone, but rather as deeply relational manifestations of cultural identity. These include notions of self and belonging for individuals and groups in any society and at any given point in history. Within the broad scope of artistic exploration, this thesis draws on the innovative exchange and collaboration between two broad cultural bodies of performativity; namely, Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices.

The following section examines this cross-cultural tenet from the perspective of those who have encountered performative affinity between Indian and Indigenous Australian dance practices; artistic languages that in spite of colonisation and the ongoing globalisation of cultures are replete with the traditional worldviews of their ancestors.

Indian and Australian Dance Dialogues

An early recognition of cultural affinity between Indian and Indigenous Australian performers occurred in Perth, WA, during the Indian Ocean Arts Festival in 1979. A cross-cultural improvisation of dance and music was explored by the renowned Indian classical dance scholar and artist Dr Padma Subrahmanyam and the Gugudja people of the Great Sandy Desert. The impromptu encounter between the artists is recounted by Holroyde and Westrip (2010, 20–21):

When Dr Padma Subrahmanyam attended the pioneer Indian Ocean Arts Festival in Perth, a most remarkable encounter occurred in the presence of over 200 Indian Ocean artists. Even though the meeting took place in 1979, it remains a striking memory for us of a seminal moment, a magic encounter for the first time between Aboriginal peoples from an area of Western Australia's northern desert region and a classical Indian dancer and her musician colleagues. ... Larry Gundora, Elder leader of these northern traditional Aborigines, and his companions Jimmy Underbuckle and Greg Mosquito began to hum a ritual song cycle. Immediately an animated Padma and her Carnatic musicians joined Gundora on the floor.

They took up the melodic line into a South Indian raga pitched in exactly the same key and with almost identical phraseology. Excitedly, Tamil words and Gugudja dialect were exchanged. Similarities in the words for fire, elbow and sun emerged, among others.

The affinities felt during this exchange mirrored the words of Dr Subrahmanyam's guru, who told her that she may meet one of the long-lost *Shaivite*⁵⁰ tribes of India during her visit to Australia (Holroyde and Westrip 2010, 21). However, in discussions with local academics, Dr Subrahmanyam found they completely refuted the possibility of cultural connections between India and Australia. Undiscouraged, the Indian dance scholar 'left convinced that given time and a chance to travel throughout Australia to meet Aborigines themselves, [the existing] western scholastic tunnel vision could be bypassed' (21).

While Dr Subrahmanyam pioneered this artistic dialogue between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices, decades later, another researcher and artist of Indian descent, Beena Sharma (2001, 2009), investigated similar ideas. Sharma (2009) explored these through her Master's thesis, which she subsequently published as the book, *Awakening of the Serpent Energy Through Tantra*. Sharma's research is one of the only publications to date that looks into the significant similarities between the two streams of dance philosophy. Her research is founded upon the esoteric ideas and symbolism inherent in the metaphysical concept of the serpent as found in the oral histories of India and Australia. Sharma's work was originally performed at the Art Gallery of NSW, Australia, and centred on a collaborative performance highlighting the worldviews of the serpent energy in motion. As Sharma danced in the Indian classical dance style known as Kathak, a male co-performer danced in a contemporary genre of Indigenous Australian dance. Together, the two accomplished artists created a unique cultural dialogue and explored the affinity of serpent energy in a creative space, whereby 'loans or borrowings' between the two cultures were incorporated into the final performance (Sharma 2001, 58).

Sharma believes her inquiry into the serpent residing within the two dance cultures, which resulted in an intercultural dance performance, also shifted the culturally symbolic and political

⁵⁰ This particular Hindu sect venerates Śiva as their primary form of divinity.

spheres of the cultures, giving rise to a newly performed dance culture altogether (Sharma 2001, 58). She further argued that such intercultural dialogues are not contained within the walls of performance, but continue to exist 'at any given point of time and space within a social culture ... And each moment in that time and space is like an improvisation, like an experimental piece' (60). Sharma's research ultimately parallels the metaphysical serpent concept in India and Australia that she integrates in her dance exploration.

The theme of intercultural collaboration and exploration has also been central to the creative vision of the Perth-based Ochre Dance Company. 'Kaya', produced in 2016, featured Indigenous Australian, Maori and Indian performance practices. It showcased Indian contemporary dancer and actress Isha Sharvani alongside a range of performers, including Indigenous Australian artist and actor Trevor Jamieson. According to Ochre's artistic director, Mark Howett, the main focus of the exchange was to 'find a dialogue that's more progressive rather than about conflict and extremes' (Nichols 2016). As a result, 'Kaya' drew attention to strong artistic affinities between Indian and Indigenous Australian cultural expressions of dance, leading the team to develop a future project that will take them to India 'to explore the commonality even more' (Michele 2017). Ochre Dance Company has since navigated these cultural connections and more in collaboration with the Daksha Seth Dance Company.⁵¹

The idea of intercultural collaboration between Indigenous Australian and Indian themes has also been portrayed in several performances conceptualised and directed by academic and artist Dr Priya Srinivasan. Her works, such as 'Serpent Dreaming Women' and 'Churning Waters', creatively navigated Indigenous Australian, Indian diasporic and Indian women's cultural affinity to one another and to Mother Earth.⁵² Srinivasan's combined scholarly and performative genius has shed significant light on the powerful intersections between the two cultures and peoples whose art facilitates more than just entertainment.

⁵¹ The dance company is made up of extraordinary and unique artists; namely, Daksha Seth, her husband Dev Issaro, and their children Tao Issaro and Isha Sharvani. The company's ongoing intercultural exploration with Ochre in 'Kwongkan' (sand) premiered at the Perth Festival in February 2019.

⁵² Srinivasan's 'Serpent Dreaming Women' (2017) was performed at the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Melbourne, Victoria, and 'Churning Waters' (2019) was staged in Chennai, Kanchipuram and Puducherry in Tamil Nadu.

With a similar artistic and research motivation, this thesis brings Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance perspectives into dialogue in contemporary performative spaces.

Engaging Dancescapes

Indian and Indigenous Australian dance domains have sustained important worldviews over many thousands of years. This challenging balance has sometimes floundered under the pressure of violent colonisation, but has also seen the unfolding of powerful 'new' modalities of dance. In spite of the natural inclination for the human body to explore and explicate diverse categories of movement (whether previously learned or spontaneously expressed), these dance practices have retained cultural integrity through recurrent artistic adaptation and syncretism. With this in mind, this thesis set out to innovate and explore Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes in dialogue. Subsequent chapters explore and delineate the intercultural and interpretative model and vision of the dancescape. These chapters contain both a series of videos and written text. Together, these elements creatively re-present and recount personal memories and insights gained through the dancescapes.

Chapter Four

Dancescapes in Dialogue—An Awakening

Elucidated through the methodological device of autoethnography, this chapter begins with the video, 'An Awakening'—an innovative visual re-presentation of my initial research into Indigenous Australian dance practices. The video is followed by written passages that elaborate on personal insights and experiences. This text examines the 'same but different' performative ideas engaged in Indigenous Australian and Indian classical worlds of dance. Both visual and written narratives are inspired by Indigenous understandings and awareness of the sentient earth. The chapter illustrates how my initial engagement of Indigenous Australian dance cultures altered my relatedness to the animate earth. It also highlights the initial changes to my performative psyche.

The opening sequences of the video feature Uncle Ken Colbung and Swamiji at the Dance India Taste India Festival 1998 (as detailed in the thesis Prelude). Uncle Ken's ceremonial 'Welcome' performed during the inauguration of Annalakshmi on the Swan (the not-for-profit culinary wing of TFA International) in Perth, WA is also included. Apart from these initial sequences, both the video and written chapter are presented in three parts. Part I and Part II relate my foremost visit to Arnhem Land for the Wägilak Recording Project in Ngukurr and the Garma Festival (2011) in Gulkula. Resonating dance vocabularies and techniques between Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance are described, alongside cultural views of sentient landscapes and country. Part III highlights how my ontological perceptions and practice of Indian classical dance have been altered by Warlpiri elder Steve Wantarri Patrick's cultural views of 'speaking' and 'listening' to the land or country. It depicts the implicit dialogues that recur in my psyche and that eventually led to the conceptual model and vision of the 'dancescape'.

An Awakening

Please open the 'C4_Video.mp4' file to view the 'An Awakening' video before reading this chapter. Refer to the 'Thesis_Guide.pdf' for more information.

Audio-visual Summary: An Awakening

[11.46min]

Meeting of Two Camps/ Gondwana Connections		[00.00—02.40min]
Location(s)	Perth Esplanade Grounds (Prior to Elizabeth Quay development in 1998), Annalakshmi on the Swan and Point Fraser, Perth, WA	
Date(s)	1998, 2003, 2015	
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Swamiji, Uncle Ken Colbung, Lalitha Colbung	
Others	TFA dancers, Annalakshmi Perth volunteers/guests	
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Vijay Kumar, Kumar Kandiah, Arun Kumar	
Photo Credits	Kumar Kandiah	

Part I: The Wägilak Chapter		[02.41—06.56min]
Location(s)	Roper River Crossing, Ngukurr Community and Ngukurr Arts Centre, Arnhem Land, NT	
Date(s)	2011, 2016	
Featuring	Daniel Wilfred, David Wilfred, Benjamin Wilfred	
Others	Wägilak community in Ngukurr	
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Dr Samuel Curkpatrick	
Audio Credits	Wägilak elders and leaders	
Photo Credits	Sidha Pandian, Tobias Titz	

Part II: The Garma Festival		[06.57—09.44min]
Location(s)	Gulkula, Arnhem Land, NT; Kings Park, Point Fraser and SMV, Perth, WA	
Date(s)	2011, 2015, 2017	
Featuring	Garma <i>bungul</i> performers, SMV staff and students	
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Arun Kumar	

Part III: Contemplations on <i>Nr̥tta</i>—Dance		[09.45—11.46min]
Location(s)	Kings Park, SMV and Annalakshmi on the Esplanade, Perth, WA; Chidambaram Temple, India; Borobudur and Pawon Temples, Indonesia	
Date(s)	2003, 2015, 2016	
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Drs Vish and Hari Ramakonar, Dr Padma Subrahmanyam	
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Kumar Kandiah, Arun Kumar	
Audio Credits	O. S. Arun, Shankar Kandasamy, Muttara Rajendran	
Photo Credits	Sidha Pandian, Dr Padma Subrahmanyam, Shankar S., Saranya Chidambaram	

Specific events, ideas, narratives and/or themes portrayed in the video are highlighted in the written passages with time references as per the following example:

After almost two hours the vehicle carefully makes its way across the
gushing waters of the Roper River, taking us to our destination via
another earthen track [►03:00–03:16].

Some of these time references overlap and/or are repeated in the written text to reflect the similar and/or layered themes and ideas. These visual markers also appear in Chapter Five.

Part I: The Wägilak Chapter

First Impressions

It is around eight in the morning and I am on board the non-air-conditioned Bodhi Bus [►02:48–02:55] in Katherine, NT, travelling to Ngukurr—a community located in southeast Arnhem Land [►03:17–03:22]. It is my first visit to Australia’s north, where I will assist PhD scholar Samuel Curkpatrick in the Wägilak Recording Project.¹ Hours have passed and my eyes remain drawn to the unique colours and contours of the remote country. It is almost meditative to watch the dark shadows of passing clouds glide across the red earth. Hills, plateaus and large boulders are visible kilometres ahead. Dust and debris whirl through the terrain, shaded in multiple tones of green. The visual silence of the natural landscape, unhindered by concrete structures and bitumen roads, rejuvenates my senses [►03:26–03:44]. After almost two hours, the vehicle carefully makes its way across the gushing waters of the Roper River, taking us to the remote community via another earthen track [►03:00–03:16].

My arrival coincides with the re-opening of Ngukurr’s only store, for which the Wägilak Yolŋu² perform a ‘shop-opening ceremony’ (Daniel Wilfred, conversation with author 2011). After watching *manikay* (song) and *bungul* (dance) on film and reading about it in academic texts, it is surreal to finally witness it firsthand. Returning to film and academic texts, I learn that the performance is both entertainment and a means by which people re-activate the ancestral domain (Hokari 2011; Magowan 2000, 2005; Tamisari 1998, 2000).

¹ Now ANU alumni Dr Curkpatrick’s project aimed to ‘create integrated records of Wägilak *manikay* [song] and its associated dances, stories, texts and relations to sites on country’ through digital technologies (Curkpatrick 2012a, 1). The project also received a funding grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

² Yolŋu society is divided into two moieties: Dhuwa and Yirritja, with the Wägilak coming under the former. In the 1970s, these Yolŋu, whose home country, Njilipidji, is located further inland from the northeast coast of Arnhem Land, were forced to live at Ngukurr, formerly a Christian mission (Curkpatrick 2013, 38; 45–8). Having arrived in the mission much later than other cultural groups, the Wägilak were relatively less affected by colonisation and religious reform, and so managed to maintain their cultural knowledge of ritual and ceremony. For this reason, they are now trusted with ceremonial duties by various Indigenous groups in Ngukurr and other nearby communities (Curkpatrick 2013, 48).

Powerful male voices charge the performance area as they utter the names and stories of ancestral beings. Men, women and children of all ages animate these narratives through their dance movements and gestures. Their movements are synchronized with the rhythms of the *yidaki* (didgeridoo) and *bilma* (wooden clapping sticks). The women effortlessly sway their hips from side to side, while simultaneously shuffling and striking their feet upon the ground. The men vigorously pound and leap into the ground, moving in different directions across the dance floor. Though the male and female dance movements appear different, they embrace a common technique and rhythm of moving through punctuations of feet upon the ground. As the ceremonial performance continues, I realise that while this cultural experience is new, the musicality and movements are not.

The Wägilak performers' rhythmic 'digging', 'shuffling' and other movement vocabularies resonate with my classical dance training in Bharatanatyam and Odissi [►08:26–09:05]. These movements are performed to the *bilma*, which is similar to the sounds produced by the wooden *thattu kazhi* or 'hitting stick' used in southern Indian classical dance practices such as Bharatanatyam [►08:50–09:00]. The combined intonation of the wooden instrument and feet hitting the earth have been entrenched in my psyche from the age of three. The complex cadences of the *yidaki* and the vocal techniques of the *manikay* add to the sense of familiarity. Both the sung and spoken languages among the Wägilak and other Yolŋu mirror the phonetics in the Indian languages of Tamil and Telugu. These affinities invariably rekindle memories of Noongar elder Uncle Ken Colbung and my guru Swamiji, who embraced the relationships between India and Australia [►00:12–02:27]. My observation of these 'same but different' elements during my work placement in Ngukurr further prompts a re-viewing of my Indian culture and traditional thought.

The Wägilak Recording Project

[The *bungul* and] *manikay* repertoires and narratives belonging to the Wägilak clan offer rich and poetic illuminations of human existence that are simultaneously dense, abstract, philosophic, law-containing, tangibly corporeal and creatively engaging. ... These vital cultural expressions represent an accumulated wealth of experience, passed down through successive generations from origins beyond definitive human knowledge

and agency, forming traditions inherently concerned with questions of orthodoxy, perpetuation and sustenance. (Curkpatrick 2013, 2)

These performative expressions are the foundations of Wägilak law and are repositories of cultural and ecological knowledge [►03:49–04:25]. Though Wägilak elders and leaders have continued with these responsibilities, they noticed their youth were increasingly uninterested in performing their ancestral expressions of *manikay* and *bungul* (Daniel Wilfred, conversation with author 2011). This concern, together with the fact that the spoken language of Wägilak is classified as an endangered language (Curkpatrick 2012a, 2),³ led to the Wägilak Recording Project.

The focus of the project was to document public traditions of *manikay* and *bungul* with commentaries and discussions elaborating the personal links and historical contexts of the performances. The audio-visual documentation would be stored in the Ngukurr Language Centre and AIATSIS archives, as a means of preserving ancestral narratives, language and performative knowledge for future generations of Wägilak. Curkpatrick designed and led the project, with strong support and guidance from the Wägilak community in Ngukurr, especially elder Andy Peters and leaders Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred.

The two main recording sessions essential to the Wägilak Recording Project took place in Ngukurr. The first was the audio recording of the *manikay* series, initially to be held on the Wägilak homeland, Ngilipidji. However, due to lack of time and travel logistics, the recording was held at the Ngukurr Arts Centre [►04:36–05:05]. The *bungul* associated with these songs was subsequently filmed in the backyard of a Wägilak leader's house [►05:19–06:33]. These recordings were intentionally made on two separate days so that those who sang the *manikay* could also participate in the *bungul*.

As an assistant on this project, I was not only privy to the interviews with elders and leaders around life histories, music and dance, but also developed deep-rooted friendships with some of the participants. The experience deepened and developed my understanding of how Indigenous performativity is emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and metaphysically

³ 'Wägilak, the Dhuwa dialect of Rithaarrngu, ... is given the endangerment rating of 0—no longer fully spoken' (Curkpatrick 2012a, 2).

entwined with one's country. These views were filtered through my Indian cultural and philosophical lens. The following passages relate my participation in these recording sessions.

Documenting Wägilak *Manikay* and *Bungul*

A long, long time ago the ghost Djuwalpada walked through the stone country. He danced and sang his way through the land, searching for the place that was to become the home of the Wägilak people. Djuwalpada's [*bilma*] clapsticks broke the lingering stillness and his song happened. On this site, the homeland of Ngilipidji was founded and Djuwalpada danced. A song was sung, the same one that is performed today. (Curkpatrick 2012b)

Playing their *bilma* synchronously, a group of Wägilak songmen recount an ancestral story via *manikay*: 'Djuwalpada Njirriyinjirriyi Dhawal wal duy'yun Likandhu-nupan Djuwalpada' (Curkpatrick 2013, 379).⁴ Their collective voices invoke an inexplicable shift in the atmosphere.

To perform *manikay* is to read this ancestral text ... Carried through performance, the ancestral text articulates a narrative—for the past, for the present and for the future—handed down through the generations and underpinned by a conservative imperative to transmit and retain. For Yolŋu, the performance of *manikay* is an encounter with tradition that holds the present to account through perennial human questions of death, existence and identity. (69–70)

It is now young Wägilak leader Daniel Wilfred's turn to occupy 'centre stage' with his *manikay*. Singing against the backdrop of paintings and artefacts in the Ngukurr Arts Centre, Daniel appears withdrawn from his immediate surroundings [►04:44–05:05]. He sings the story of his ancestor, Djuwalpada:

⁴ English translation: 'Djuwalpada, Njirriyinjirriyi [naming the ancestor,] walking across the country [Njilipidji] Djuwalpada with elbows pointing' (Curkpatrick 2013, 379).

Djiṇala gurru yalagarayi Mawululayi

He's going up to N̄lipidji

Gumurr-wuma wākura dādutj-manayi

Pulled to the country by his chest

Gumurr yabalayi gumurr-wuma gumurr-gumirila balayi

Walking back to his place. (Curkpatrick 2013, 380)

Looking into the distance, the young Wāgilak is viscerally transported back to his home country, N̄lipidji:

I can see the trees, the river, my people ... and I am singing there. I am sitting down with my legs crossed. (Daniel Wilfred, telephone conversation with author 2013)

That's my land. I used to walk around with my mum and dad, getting bush tucker. And my dad took me around to get didjeridu, *yidaki*. And we went to get *bilma* ... And I start singing myself ... just live there, eating bush tucker, learning *manikay*. (Daniel Wilfred, quoted in Curkpatrick 2013, 38)

Daniel's voice expresses something above and beyond vocal style and technique. He not only sings as the descendent of Djuwalpada but also as this ancestor. Though his powerful voice charges the atmosphere, it is his ability to become the ancestor [►05:10–05:14] that truly enlivens the performative space.

The Wāgilak men continue to sing their ancestral history into being. Their voices remain replete with the memories and sentiments of N̄lipidji, also referred to as 'stone spear country'—Lārra (Curkpatrick 2013, 37–40). The 'pink streaked *ṇambi* (stone spear heads) and knives' found in this area are imbued with '*mārr* (spiritual power; essence)' (38). More importantly, Djuwalpada uses these spears in the creation of sacred Wāgilak laws:

Marrayunmara gara guthanbiny

Aiming, shakes his spear, runs towards the country

Yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra

Aiming the spear, ready to throw, aiming

Gulyunmirr galpu, madayin- marrayi.

Thrown from the spear-thrower making the sacred law. (Curkpatrick 2013, 380)

The singers pause for a break. It has been a long day of recording the *manikay* series. Some drink water, while others check on their children, who are playing outside the arts centre. No one disappears for long, as another ancestral story is about to be recounted through song.

Seated across from the all-male ensemble, I am moved by Daniel's explication of *manikay*. Though all aspects of his music trace back to his ancestors, Daniel's vocal renditions also reveal his own emotional and spiritual connections to the metaphysical:

It didn't matter that he wasn't covered in ochre and sitting under a stringybark tree at his ancestral estate of Ngilipidji on the Walker River, Northern Territory. What mattered was that the [*bilma*] clapsticks were coming together—two pieces of wood—striking, meeting, colliding. What came out of the collision? Sound. Music. Song. (Curkpatrick 2012b)

More than four hours of Wägilak *manikay* have been recorded. Though exhausted, the songmen leave Ngukurr Arts Centre with a sense of accomplishment. Additional *bungul* aligning with this repertoire are to be filmed the following morning at Benjamin Wilfred's⁵ place. Here, the *manikay* is animated through a different voice—the language of movement.

A light-hearted energy infiltrates the home in Ngukurr as men and women together retrace their ancestral paths via *bungul* [►05:37–06:33]:

A term which, according to context, can refer to, 'ceremonial event' and more specifically to 'dancing' is, like painting and song, a means by which knowledge is acquired, accumulated and transmitted. To dance as a virtuoso or as ... an ordinary background dancer is to show oneself to be

⁵ A young Wägilak leader who significantly contributed his cultural knowledge of *manikay* and its associated dances to the Wägilak Recording Project.

knowledgeable and to legitimise such knowledge through performance.

(Tamisari 2000, 278)

However, the process of filming the *bungul* outside its usual ceremonial context inevitably blurs performative subjectivities. The pre-recorded *manikay* series plays through a sound system set up in Benjamin's backyard. Dancers are aware that two cameras on tripods have started to record their movements [►05:19–05:34]. Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred are hesitant to dance to their own vocals, but eventually join the *bungul*. Their performance adds to the accumulating ancestral agencies swarming about the *bungul* grounds.

The shuffling, pounding, striking, leaping and other actions of the feet, combined with certain hand and body movements, are central to the *manikay*. However, the dancers are not used to performing *bungul* without live musical accompaniment. The absence of creative interaction and play between dancers and musicians affects the enthusiasm that would usually infuse the performative space. Neither are there any spectators to cheer on the *bungul* performers. Some of the men have now started to play their *bilma* and *yidaki* and begin singing along with the pre-recorded *manikay*. But as time goes by, they too join the *bungul*. The recurring mention of ancestral names and events heard through the *manikay* and enacted through movements and gestures begins to alter the *feel* of the performance. Gradually, the mood shifts as the dancers begin to express their deep-seated memories and sentiments of their sacred home country.

The temperature continues to increase, but a cool breeze comforts the Wägilak dancers as they repeat fundamental movements. The concept of repeating particular dance steps for hours on end is a means of intensifying the image, sights and sounds of ancestral journeys. Repetition directly expresses Indigenous histories through the corporeal, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and metaphysical faculties of performance. Thus, repetition is not just about perfecting skills, but rather is a vital element of the *bungul* that enables the re-presencing of ancestral consciousness. These steps are not just casual movements, but *are* the original actions of the ancestors and thus infused with the *märr* (spiritual essence) borne from the Wägilak soil of Njilidji. Each corporeal movement potentially activates the presence of Wägilak ancestors and their law. In this way, participation in *bungul* brings country to people, and people to their country [►06:37–06:53]. Performance not only renews existing and

existential ties between people and country, but also assists people in collectively returning to their original soul precinct.

As the *bungul* repertoire comes to an end, a sense of spiritual repose and cultural pride pervades the performance space. Soon, the cameras are turned off, the sound system is removed from Benjamin's backyard and everyone goes home. The Wägilak elders and leaders seem comforted to know that the collective recording project has now officially documented an important aspect of their (public) performance repertoire. If any of their children or grandchildren need to see or hear these traditions, they will be able to access the audio-visual documentation made specifically for them (Daniel Wilfred, conversation with author 2011).

The use of technologies to document public or discrete ritual and ceremonial practices is challenging. While films themselves do not constitute ritual or ceremony, their audio-visual content does. Just as the pre-recorded *manikay* assisted in the video recording of *bungul*, the visual documentation of the latter presumably has the ability to affect viewers' consciousness. While the physical encounter of dance is often assumed to be a corporeal event, visual representations of performances can elicit deep physical and normative responses.

Seen in this light, the audio-visual documentation of Wägilak *manikay* and *bungul* not only records, but also (re)produces performance traditions. Through film, we can see, hear, feel, respond, learn and think anew, creatively or otherwise. Therefore, it is never a static encounter, but a medium that assists in the ongoing and ever-renewing dialogue of performative consciousness. I would argue that film becomes instrumental in the recursive dialogues between that which is documented in a certain time and place, and the viewers' reception of it at any given time and place.

My exposure to the Wägilak people's knowledge and culture started to raise questions for me around the ways in which cultural cosmologies are linked with 'dance' and 'country'; not as separate entities, but as deeply entwined metaphysical subjects. Even though I had not stepped onto Wägilak homelands, the experience of *manikay* and *bungul* led to me see and hear Djuwalpada roam across the stone-spear landscape of Njilipidji. The seeds of inquiry about my Indian classical dance roots and their relevance to country were thereby planted. However,

it was not until the night before I left Ngukurr that an unexpected exchange between Daniel Wilfred and myself brought these interconnections to the surface.

A Sense of Awakening

‘Dhith thaam kita thaka thari kita thaka thari kita thaka jhum...’ I recite as I simultaneously plunge into the opening *jathi*—pure dance sequence of the Bharatanatyam *Varnam*, ‘Swami Naan Unthan Adimai’ [▶10:25–10:48].⁶ Daniel Wilfred stands two metres in front of me with a wide grin. The wooden floors of the Language Centre veranda reverberate as my feet continue to greet them. After performing the *Nrtta* component of the item, I then say the words of the song through my hand gestures and facial expressions. The item is one of my favourites, as the lyrics in praise of lord Śiva are layered in esotericism. The performer can envisage herself as an ardent devotee of this Hindu deity; yet as the dance unfolds, Śiva’s form and cosmic dance translates into the abstract and eternal movements of the universe.

As I continue to praise Śiva through the dance item for Daniel, I relate the symbolism embedded in the lyrics. I realise that our oral histories and other stories, though different, mirror a similar ontological premise; namely, where the sentient scapes of country are infused with ancestral narratives. As I demonstrate the dance, I come to realise that my performative precepts are in dialogue with Wägilak worldviews.

The Bharatanatyam steps I perform are entrenched in my cultural upbringing. Yet a wave of difference filters through each of my movements. As I strike my feet, I imbibe an inexplicable sense of connectivity to the animate environment around me. Over the next hour, we exchange ‘notes’ on Wägilak and Indian classical dance. Held slightly above chest level, Daniel gracefully alternates his right then left elbows, pointing them in the different directions of travel made by his creative ancestor in the search for sugar bag. We compare Wägilak and Indian classical movements and techniques, which rhythmically punctuate our feet into the earth. Demonstrating the basic Bharatanatyam unit of movement, known as the *thattu adavu*

⁶ The *Varnam* is the main highlight of the Bharatanatyam dance repertoire and is usually the longest and most challenging piece. The *Varnam* ‘Swami Naan Undan Adimai’ initially begins with the devotee exclaiming to Lord Śiva himself that the ‘entire world is aware that I am your (Śiva’s) slave’, after which the devotee expresses his/her pining to see and unite with the lord.

[▶08:38–08:44], both Daniel and I agree that this ‘digging into the ground’ is practiced among the Wägilak as well as other Indigenous Australian dance cultures.

We continue our dance dialogue. Daniel learns the Bharatanatyam hand and body gestures that mimic the gait of a peacock, the flight of a swan [▶11:03–11:15], the prancing of deer and those that distinguish the elements of wind, fire, water, space and earth. He teaches me Wägilak steps that mirror these ideas in some way. Before we retire from this artistic exchange, the Wägilak leader asks that I dance the ‘pure dance’ movements or *Nṛtta* (as described in Chapter Three) once again. He is curious about this particular style of dance. Daniel says that it *speaks* to him.

Nuances of a Journey

My visit to Ngukurr left me indebted to the Wägilak and also others in the community who had welcomed me into their lives and traditional world.⁷ Their stories about ancestral spirits who left their marks on and as the landscape reflected my own ancestors’ ontological engagement with the earth and the greater cosmos. As in other Indigenous Australian cultures, the Wägilak’s embrace of the sentient environment reminded me of countless Hindu rituals and ceremonies that revere the *pañcabhūthas* (five elemental forces) and *Bhūmī-Devī*, the divine personification of the Earth as Mother. The latter is eminent within the Indian classical dance domain in the form of the *Bhūmī Praṇāṁ*, or salutations to the Earth Mother.⁸ These understandings, embedded in my traditional upbringing, were percolating to the surface as I literally *moved* with Yolŋu people through different parts of their country in Arnhem Land. Witnessing individuals and groups dancing and singing for, on and about their sentient homelands, for reasons well beyond simple entertainment, activated a growing insight into my own cultural perceptions of ‘dance’. The resonances between Yolŋu and Indian classical

⁷ In addition to the philosophies or theories prescribed by their predecessors, the Wägilak and other Indigenous residents of Ngukurr had engrained in their consciousness an ongoing practice of locating and identifying living presence in the land. There were ongoing references to country as sacred but also infused with dangerous powers. At times, I had to turn my gaze away from certain ‘dangerous’ hills and plateaus as we drove past, or was advised not to touch a sacred design by a natural spring because people would get hurt. Conversely, I was sometimes told that spirits would protect me and that I was safe in the community—that no snake or insect would harm me. The beauty was that there was no justification or explanation, just a straight statement of fact. It was rejuvenating to be around people who embraced their world with such conviction, yet who engaged a complex web of understanding in their relationships with the animate environment.

⁸ Also known as the *thatti kumbidal*, the performative exploration of this preliminary dance acknowledgment is discussed in Chapter Five.

performative dance discourses not only revealed the links between dance and the animate environment, but also altered my cultural underpinnings and approach to dancing upon the sacred earth [►09:27–09:46].

Listening to elders and leaders speak, perform and paint their creative ancestors' links to Indigenous homelands also reminded me of some of the oldest temples in India, which often reside upon, around or in close proximity to sacred hills, rivers, mountains, rocks and other natural features of the landscape.⁹ Looking back at Indian classical dance history in particular, it is evident that countless oral histories and stories were performed within the sacred domain of these temples. From this perspective, I start noticing 'same but different' performative attributes among diverse genres of Indigenous Australian and Indian dance that interconnect people and sacred geographies.

The collective ways of the Wägilak triggered a rediscovery of deep intellectual, emotional and spiritual connections between (my)self and the environment. This was especially highlighted through dance. I continued to explore these ideas via the vital concept of dancing upon country during my subsequent work placement at the Garma Festival 2011, held in Gulkula, in northeast Arnhem Land.

⁹ For example, the Vellai Pillayaar temple in Tirukovillur, Tamil Nadu, has a small rock that is worshipped as the elephant-faced Hindu icon Gaṇeśa. In Tiruvannamalai, pilgrims circle the Arunachala hill, which is seen as Lord Śiva himself. The Ganges River that flows through the northern delta of India is visualised as Ganga, the female Goddess who flows between the matted locks on Lord Śiva's head. Many of these sacred sites are linked to various cosmologies and other historical narratives that may differ among the vast bodies of Indigenous culture and thought across the Indian subcontinent. In the case of Tibet, the Himalayas and especially Mount Kailash are linked with Lord Śiva.

Part II: The Garma Festival

Histories of Home

After more than 12 hours of travelling through off-road tracks with a group of volunteers and ground staff, I finally reach the remote location of Gulkula for my second work placement.¹⁰ Within moments of our arrival, we are *welcomed* onto the sacred lands of the Gumatj people. It is here that the Yolŋu ancestor Ganbulapula brought the *yidaki* to life and bestowed it upon the Gumatj. The ancestor also ‘formed an open area, called yati, or a garma, for public ceremonials’ (Gaykamangu et al., quoted in Phipps 2016, 693). In this way, the entire vicinity of Gulkula is imbued with the ancestor’s actions:

In his search for honey Ganbulapula used his walking stick to hit the trees and so disturb the bees. With his hand shielding his eyes from the sun as he looked up, Ganbulapula could see the tiny black bees hovering around their hive in the hollow of a tree. He is known to look upwards to trace the flight of bees. (Yothu Yindi Foundation 2019)

I wander through the remote bush in Gulkula and eventually watch the sun disappear behind the horizon of stringy bark trees, inviting a star-studded night sky. I am soon overcome by the loud quiet of nature. I begin to see that the land around me is alive, which means that it must also see me [►07:10–07:33]. Yet how do I justify such experiences in a world predominantly saturated in a Western European psyche, which struggles to see the cosmos as alive.

As noted in the first half of this thesis, Indigenous Australian notions of home are interwoven with practice that operates through the interaction between the living world and people: between place and body. Accordingly, bodily practices of dance renew relationships between people and their ancestral homelands. This experience is facilitated through thinking, feeling, expressing, embodying, learning and re-living histories embedded in country—creating *home*.

At Gulkula, ancestral narratives are soaked in atmosphere, where the sounds, vision, touch, smell and taste of the country are immediate reminders of Ganbulapula’s journeys. However,

¹⁰ Here I will assist the festival director Andrish Saint-Claire and work alongside the team responsible for the festival setup.

well before the Garma Festival began, a dance dialogue between a particular man and his homeland would deepen my views of Indigenous performativity and relationships to country.

Dancing Upon Homeland

A group of us gather around the dim-lit escarpment at Gulkula and silently observe an NT Government police corrections officer leading two of his Indigenous inmates to the dance grounds. We have strict instructions not to film or photograph the occasion. There is no introduction of any kind, but the men whisper something to each other. Wearing their prison clothing, one of them starts clapping his hands and then breaks into a song, while the other vigorously strikes his feet into the ground. A gentle breeze passes through the performative space and the hairs on my arms begin to stand. My gaze falls upon the dancer, a Yolŋu inmate still serving his sentence but who happens to be on his country because of a 'work camp program' initiative run by Berrimah prison.¹¹

A dynamic dialogue between the man and his home country is invoked through dance. While his limbs speak of ancestral movements, they are also entwined with his life stories. The dancer executes his movement vocabulary with precision and technique, but these are not his primary focus. His dance evokes deep connections and belonging to the grounds where he continues to leave his imprints. The 'dancing body in its kinesthetic specificity formulates an appeal to viewers to be apprehended and felt' (Foster 2011, 218). It leads us 'to participate collectively in discovering the communal basis' of this unique performative experience (218). As he comes to the end of his dance sequence, the inmate lands on his knees and begins to cry profusely. The officer in charge comes to his aid and as they both stand up, we give them a heartfelt applause. Many of us are also shedding tears at this point.

That night, I am preoccupied with the moving images of the Berrimah inmate's dance. I realise I have been deeply affected by his performance. I also continue to sense an inherent affinity with the movement style, vocabulary and worldview around nature, spirit and ancestral

¹¹ The Berrimah Prison was an all-male, maximum-security prison that operated from 1979-2014. In 2011, a group of Indigenous inmates came to the Garma Festival as part of a 'work camp program' initiative. While the men were camped several kilometers away from the main festival site, the voluntary team would see them during meal times, as they were helping with the setting up, cleaning and winding down of the festival. However, there was very little interaction between the two groups, as instructed by the staff and others in charge at the time. From 2014, the Doug Owston Correctional Centre, located in Holtze, south of Darwin, became the new minimum to maximum-security prison for males and females in the NT.

activities. Contemplating these thoughts, I look forward to witnessing the kaleidoscope of Yolŋu performing arts to be presented at the annual Garma Festival.

The Garma Festival at Gulkula

It is the night before the festival begins and people from across Australia arrive in Gulkula by the busload. Many of us guide festival attendees to their respective camp zones. The entire site looks and feels different from when we first arrived. Corporate companies and government agencies are setting up their information stalls. The Key Forum space is lined with chairs ready for the guest speakers and panel discussions. The Message Sticks Film area, Youth Forum, visual arts gallery and the areas designated for gender-based cultural workshops are all set. The earthen paths through the stringy bark trees are now lit and the once empty grounds are completely occupied with tents.

Hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation,¹² the festival aims to create a dynamic cultural exchange and transmit Indigenous knowledges through a program of activities. The event also ‘brings together business leaders, international political leaders, intellectuals, academics and journalists to discuss the most pressing issues facing Australia’ (‘Yothu Yindi Foundation’, 2018).

Garma is also unique in the fact that festival attendees are camped together on site in Gulkula. People interact when standing in line for meals, watching performances and learning how to weave baskets or make spears. Everyone learns about Yolŋu traditions, which have been reproduced for millennia on this soil. However, people are also exposed to modern expressions of Yolŋu performance. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the Youth Forum have fun with hip-hop dance and other activities. Every night after the traditional *bungul*, the open grounds transform into a colourful music concert. Local artists from Arnhem Land share their pop, rock, jazz and other contemporary music with the crowd. In this manner, the festival

¹² Established in 1990, the Yothu Yindi Foundation was created to support cultural initiatives, leadership and community development and wellbeing through a range of programs that integrate the knowledge and voices of Yolŋu and other Indigenous Australians. ‘The Foundation is a not-for-profit charitable public benevolent institution, with an all- Yolŋu Board of Directors. All revenues to the Foundation go to the infrastructure and delivery of culture, health, arts, education and economic programs’ (www.yyf.com.au).

applies the Yolŋu philosophical concept of *Ganma* as ‘a collaborative conceptual space’ (Slater 2006, 31).

Ganma signifies individual currents of salt and fresh water and their confluence, which mirror the diverse streams of cultural thought and awareness that co-exist in society. The *Ganma* framework suggests that ‘independent currents can never assimilate each other, yet will always be productive in their interactions (Corn 2010, 94). The Garma Festival, spear-headed by the Gumatj, promotes exchange and dialogue between two distinct cultural categories, allowing them to meet and collaborate with mutual respect.

Through this openness and sharing of Yolŋu cultural trajectories, I too enter a dialogical space where my own performative understandings start to alter. While being surrounded by Yolŋu wisdom for more than six weeks affects my dance consciousness, it is the resonance I feel with the *bungul* that truly changes how I envision dance in relation to sentient country.

The Bungul

It is almost four in the afternoon and the festival attendees are gathered around the *bungul* grounds waiting for the Gumatj clan members to commence the evening’s first performance. The loud call of the *yidaki* can be heard in the distance. Its sound is a pertinent reminder for ‘all people to come together in unity; to gather for sharing of knowledge and culture; to learn from and listen to one another’ (‘Yothu Yindi Foundation’, 2018). The cultural custodians of the country hold their yellow flag and make their way towards the crowd. The dancers’ bodies and faces are clad with white ochre and other designs [►07:37–08:09]. This image reminds me of the Hindu practice whereby *vibudhi* (sacred ash) and other earthen pigments are designed on foreheads, arms and chest.

As the Gumatj make their way to the centre of the *bungul* grounds, every action and footprint embodies the ancestral essences of Ganbulapula:

By retracing the ancestral footprints, people not only dance a complex web of connections into being, but also convey notions of moral orientation, the following of life-ways, correct practices as well as the sharing and renewing of fundamental social values and practices. As the meaning of the footprints can be said to reside in between, that is in the

social, political and emotional bonds they fashion between ancestral events, people and country. (Tamisari 2000, 284)

Ochre-clad dancers glide, leap, kick, shuffle and leap across and into the earth causing clouds of red dust to form around them. Men, women and children enact ancestral actions enhanced by the sophisticated rhythmic cantos of the *vidaki* and vocal melodies [▶07:37–08:01].

The Gumatj make their exit while other Yolŋu clans come forward to perform their ancestral stories. Some of the male dancers run through the *bungul* grounds improvising their dance steps according to the rhythm and melodic intervals being played by the accompanying musicians. The women who stand either on the sides or in the background seamlessly weave the earth in, upon and between their feet, stepping and shuffling [▶07:49–08:13]. Complex narratives are expressed with gestures and patterns of the feet, hands and body. While each group's performance is reflective of different narratives, shared movement vocabularies and techniques are used to punctuate, graze, shuffle and slide dancers' feet, knees, shins and calves into the earth.

I listen and watch the rhythms, melodies and movement presented during the evening *bungul* program, viewing these age-old performance traditions through my Indian performative lens. The corporeal bends of the *tribhangi*, legs in *chowka* and dynamic footwork of the Odissi style appear in some of the *bungul* repertoire [▶08:18 - 08:31]. The melodic scales of certain *manikay* take me to my grandparents' villages in South India. The women's graceful sliding and shifting of feet reminds me of the gentle swaying of the female dancers of the *Santhal* tribe in India. However, what affects me most is the similarity between the rhythmic nuances of the *bilma* and the *thattu kazhi*: the diverse imprints made by the dancers' feet upon the earth, which mirror Bharatanayam *adavus*—the fundamental *Nṛtta* or 'pure dance' movement vocabulary. As expressed in the classical genre of Bharatanatyam, these movements are *payuthal adavu* (to leap/jump) [▶09:16–09:24], *sarrukal adavu* (to glide/slide across the ground), *thatti naatadavu* (to strike, slide and flex the heels) [▶09:01–09:09] and most of all *thattu adavu* (to strike into the ground). *Thattu adavu*, where the legs form a diamond shape known as the *aramandi* [▶08:39–08:45], is one of the very first movement vocabularies taught in this South Indian dance tradition.

Over the next four days of the Garma Festival, I attend to the needs of the *bungul* performers. I receive performers who arrive from different communities in Arnhem Land and take them to their respective tents. I also help with giving out the festival 'attire' and props, including coloured flags, rolls of material and one precious bucket of white ochre. The experience fosters friendships, connections and most of all gives me the opportunity to view the daily *bungul*, where I witness the remarkable dance of the Berrimah inmate once more.

While his identity may not have been known to the festival crowd, the Berrimah inmate steals our hearts on the dance floor again. Standing by the peripheries of the *bungul* grounds, the correction officer gives a nod to his inmate. Everyone watches as a man dressed in his prison clothes runs straight into the centre of the performance space and begins to improvise. There are loud cheers as he continues to dance, but then I lose sight of him and realise he is missing. When he returns, there is a thundering applause as he dances his way back into the centre of the *bungul* grounds. He is now painted up in ochre like the rest of the clan. It is highly emotional seeing this transformation, as it represents his reunion with his people and their collective connections to country. His movements seem flawless, as if the dance *danced* him. Every part of his body moves to the live music and he is immersed in movement itself. As a dancer, I am inspired beyond measure.

In retrospect, the Garma Festival experience transformed my perception of life and identity as an Indian classical dancer in multiple ways, and it was the Yolŋu inmate's performances in Gulkula that had the greatest impact. Months after my visit to Arnhem Land, I realised I was more aware of the sentient feel of the natural environment. When I walked through a park, I was reminded that the grass and the earth below it is alive [▶11:27–11:35]. I started to feel that 'dance' was not just a corporeal medium for telling stories, but also instrumental in maintaining the balance between 'self', society and the greater cosmos. As described in the thesis Introduction, it was at this point that the cultural mentorship and views of Warlpiri elder Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick started to affect my own performative worldviews. His presence at the ANU School of Music in Canberra from 2012 became instrumental in my re-viewing and re-thinking of dance and its alliance with multiple *scapes* of knowing and being. Through the Warlpiri performative lenses of my skin name and identity as *Nungarrayi*, I became progressively engaged in a deeper dialogue with myself and the sentient earth via dance.

Part III: Contemplations on *Nṛtta*—Dance

The Warlpiri Classroom

The wooden floors of a studio at the ANU School of Music reverberate with the sounds of undergraduate students thumping their bare feet. They perform a mock ceremony taught by Warlpiri elder Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick. The students are enrolled in the *Indigenous Music and Media* course, which has opened its doors to postgraduate students like myself to attend the dance and music lectures. Convened by Dr Aaron Corn,¹³ this five-day intensive course is carefully structured through Indigenous ways of knowing and is guided by Jampijimpa. Each student is designated their own Warlpiri skin name, which in turn allows them to enter and embody the worldviews and societal responsibilities associated with their newly attained identity. It is important to realise that although the students are engaged in a mock Warlpiri ceremony, their skin names are real.

The *kurrwa* or ‘skin name immediately gives a person a place in Warlpiri society because they have a known set of relationships’ (Patrick, Holmes and Box 2008, 12). Through this system of relationality, one becomes a part of the extensive Warlpiri cultural network and *Warlalja yapa*—family. As expressed by Jampijimpa (11):

Skin starts with yourself. It is about relationships to people, place, and country. Skin is a system of relatedness, connectedness, how things integrate, roles, functions, boundaries, limits. That’s an important word ‘kurrwa’ [‘stone axe’ which is symbolic of responsibility], skin name holds that one.

Importantly, the concept of skin, associated with notions of family or kin, also contributes to an important Warlpiri cultural schema and powerful Indigenous pedagogy. Through this allocation of cultural identity, people and their place in the land or country are socially located. Jampijimpa refers to this ontological model that helps perpetuate Warlpiri knowledge as *Ngurra-kurlu*.

¹³ Dr Aaron Corn was an Australian Research Council Future Fellow (2010–2014) at the ANU School of Music and also my primary supervisor during the time of this course.

Ngurra-kurlu is all about our place and sense of home. It consists of Family, Law, Land, Language, and Ceremony. Once we lose these five elements we become homeless people—people without the ability to understand our own home. We become feral in our own land. ... *Ngurra-kurlu* is the five pillars of the way this land has always been, and Indigenous people have always looked at this country—how it is written in everything around us and even embedded without ourselves. (Patrick 2015, 123–24)

Ngurra-kurlu is also perceived as *purami*, which is ‘the path’ or ‘the way’ that ‘highlights the essential features of being Warlpiri against the deafening background noise of mainstream Australian culture’ (Patrick, Holmes and Box 2008, 10). It needs to be expressed every day (Patrick 2015, 124). Comprising the five elements or pillars of Warlpiri culture, the deep pedagogy of *Ngurra-kurlu* is also seen by Jampijimpa as a body itself: ‘organs within *palka*’; ‘he’s got his own heart, he’s got his own kidneys, he’s got his own liver. If you take one of them away his whole body will drop—that way’ (Patrick, Holmes and Box 2008, 10).

Through *Ngurra-kurlu*, which includes distinctions of skin, people relate to each other and to their respective country and nature. Deeply ingrained in Warlpiri cosmology, and therefore in its society, is the view that each and every aspect of the living environment is a part of the larger family, which are also distinguished through skin relations:

All people, plants, animals, areas of country, as well as phenomena such as the stars and rain have skin names and are implicated in the same kinship system. ... In this way, skin brings people and nature into the same realm and through connections with *kuruwarri*—law, prescribes certain rights, obligations, and relationships. (Patrick and Holmes 2013)

The sanctioning of skin names thus allows students to think about and see the world through Warlpiri eyes, both in class and potentially throughout their lives. Within this unique Indigenous learning space, I too participate with my acquired skin name, *Nungarrayi*, given to me by Jampijimpa. My Warlpiri identity welcomes a new set of cultural obligations and linkages, including to dance.

Standing slightly in front of a horizontal line of girls, I demonstrate the female dance moves before we engage in the Warlpiri mock ceremony in the classroom.¹⁴ The step mainly involves the simultaneous lifting then digging of heels into the ground. While the balls of the feet and the toes shuffle, they hardly elevate from the ground, as this movement reiterates the cultural view that women are always connected to the earth; they do not move away from it (Patrick 2012). For the Warlpiri, such movements embrace the principles of *Ngurra-kurlu*, translated as ‘about home, with home, and home within’ (Patrick, Holmes and Box 2008, 7).¹⁵ I recall this step from a video of Warlpiri women dancing in the 1960s. However, in the earlier performance, the women’s thighs and feet are turned further outwards as they shuffle across the earth. This particular step resonated with a movement I had learned in the Indian classical style, Odissi [▶09:10–09:16].

Walya ‘Land’, *Kuruwarru* ‘Law’, *Manyuwana* ‘Ceremony’, *Jaru* ‘Language’ and *Warlajja* ‘Kin’ are the five interconnected fields of Warlpiri knowledge that Wantarri [Jampijimpa] theorises as comprising *Ngurra-kurlu*: ... an interculturally approachable model that outlines the classical foundations of the Warlpiri way of life. (Corn and Patrick 2015, 6)

For Jampijimpa, ‘*Ngurra-kurlu* is the five pillars of the way this land has always been, and Indigenous people have always looked at this country—how it is written in everything around us and even embedded within ourselves’ (Patrick 2015, 124). As students, we are constantly reminded by Jampijimpa that ‘even when we are walking and talking, we must still use our bodies to express *Ngurra-kurlu* to move like the wind and, with our sounds, make it talk’ (124). In other words, ‘home’ within is realised through the mindfulness when being on country at any given moment in time.

¹⁴ Corn requested that I teach these movements to the girls on behalf of Jampijimpa, as it was culturally awkward for him to teach females their movements. Jampijimpa taught me the steps in person before I assisted the girls in the course.

¹⁵ ‘The Warlpiri word *ngurra* can mean “camp”, “home”, or “residence”. *Kurlu* is a suffix meaning “with”, “having”, or “about”’ (Patrick, Holmes and Box 2008, 7).

As the days go by, I find myself completely aligned with Jampijimpa's views of tradition and other philosophies that are fostered in the classroom. The entire class wears coloured latex wristbands indicative of one of the four Warlpiri ceremonial classifications:

Worn on the left or right wrist, depending on ... a *skin* name of Left or Right matrimoiety, these bands come in four colours from the *jukurrpa* [Dreaming] of each group. The Emu group is blue, denoting water; the Day group is green, denoting vegetation; the Kangaroo is red, denoting blood; and the Night group is yellow, denoting stars. (Corn and Patrick 2015, 15)

This colour scheme is also fundamental to the ways that Warlpiri children and adults imbibe and express *Ngurra-kurlu* in the *Milpirri* Festival, a biannual event held in Jampijimpa's home community of Lajamanu, Central Australia. *Milpirri* is the resilient cloud born 'after the big storm, when the hot air and cold air meet' (Patrick 2015, 122). The festival is a metaphor for both the differences of opinions and creative expressions. It is also about finding a mutual space for collaboration. In this way, the *Milpirri* integrates ideas of 'old' with 'new', together with Indigenous and non-Indigenous customs and worldviews. These ideas are made tangible through Jampijimpa's openness to share knowledge of his peoples and country in the classroom at ANU:

Rather than teaching about Warlpiri knowledge from a detached and distanced perspective, Wantarri's pedagogical approaches encourage students not only to learn about Warlpiri knowledge, but also to learn about themselves and the world *through* Warlpiri knowledge. (Corn and Patrick 2015, 5)

The elder's teachings of Warlpiri song and dance thus become instrumental in shaping my views of the country and its histories and knowledges. As *Nungarrayi*, Jampijimpa becomes my son, my partner is identified as *Jangala*, and my two children are *Nampijimpa* and *Jampijimpa*. My yellow wristband reiterates these networks of people and animate country, which are embraced within the broad dimensions of *Ngurra-kurlu*. It is within this learning process that I

actively begin to dialogue my own perspectives of dance with Jampijimpa's worldview of performativity [▶11:19–11:57].

Movement *Speaks*

The entire class watches footage of the *Milpirri* Festival in Lajamanu. A Warlpiri man dances vigorously with his heels kicking right up to his inner thighs, giving momentum to his feet as they dig deep into the earth. His legs present a perfect diamond shape and his feet and knees are well turned out as he dances to the rhythm of the wooden *karli* (boomerang).¹⁶ Though my Indian classical lens, I read this movement as the *thattu adavu* of Bharatanatyam. While it is not the first time I have witnessed this particular dance vocabulary in Indigenous Australian performances (Dunlop 2007; Graham 2006; Magowan 2005), I am taken aback by the Warlpiri man's agility and attack of the step, which closely mirror my classical dance form, Bharatanatyam.¹⁷ These movements lead me away from my original research preoccupation with analysing the distinct dance styles and choreographies among Indigenous Australians. I am now curious to understand the philosophical meanings behind such movements, which have been performed since time immemorial.

Soon after seeing the footage, I approach Jampijimpa and ask him about the step that was performed by the Warlpiri man. For me, that particular movement reflects the foremost vocabulary of Bharatanatyam. He responds by saying, '*Nungarrayi*, this is how we *speak* to the land'. How did I not see this when the entire week was spent with Jampijimpa telling us in Warlpiri, '*Wangkayarla nguruku, kapungku nguruju pina wangkami-jarla*', which means, 'Speak to the land, and the land will speak back'. It is a simple yet powerful statement that integrates Warlpiri and other Indigenous Australian performative ways of knowing and being with ancestral landscapes. Jampijimpa's teachings of connecting with the earth through dance forever change my approach to the rhythmic digging and striking of feet in Indian classical dance practices.

However, I am also aware that bodily gestures and movements in both cultures are never straightforward in their meaning production. As in all creative movement languages, they are

¹⁶ This wooden instrument/tool is also used as a hunting device.

¹⁷ The Warlpiri man's turn out (of the thigh when assuming the *aramandi* or demi plié position) and rhythmic pace were maintained throughout his vigorous performance.

layered with knowing and being that are not only represented by the text of movement, but also interpreted by the audience. In this way, the dance is pliable in the sense that it is never *written* the same way twice (Phelan 1993). Yet as a *spoken* language of the body, it repeats the movements and actions arising from various creative histories. These histories are never static among Indigenous people, because their movement vocabularies continue to be re-presented through their Dreaming, and vice versa. Viewed from this perspective, I begin to wonder if Indian classical dance practices also encapsulate histories and cosmologies in their fundamental movement vocabularies. This leads to my contemplations on dance movements and their relatedness to the metaphysical, particularly the domain of dance and of movement ontologies as relating to and embodying animate country, which are elegantly expressed in Jampijimpa's teachings:

The sounds of the land gives us words, the words gives us songs, the songs give us ceremonies, the ceremonies give us teaching, the teaching give us our beliefs, and the beliefs give us our identity. The most important thing to understand is how to ... learn to listen to this country.
(Patrick 2015, 128)

Additionally, Jampijimpa's view that 'knowledges and histories of country are in the forms that have been called songlines, dances, paintings, petroglyphs, engravings and artefacts' (Patrick 2014, 120) transform my approach to dance. Cultural information stored within these forms is revealed through the implicit and explicit dialogues that recur between people, and between people and their home country. Such dialogues are further investigated through my Warlpiri skin identity as *Nungarrayi*. This process invites phenomenological encounters of dance as being about the interconnections of the corporeal, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, metaphysical and other ways of knowing and being. The following section describes this engagement, facilitated through my Indian classical dance practice.

Speaking through *Nrtta*

It is five-thirty in the afternoon and I am late for the weekly dance class held in a dance studio in the suburb of Victoria Park, Perth, WA. Sukhi Shetty-Krishnan, who most of us address as Sukhi *Akka* (elder sister) and who is the head of the holistic educational community known as

the Saraswati Mahavidhyalaya, or SMV, takes the class.¹⁸ The moment I arrive at the dance studio, I rush towards the altar, where my gurus' pictures and some idols are placed, and mentally recite the *mantras* acknowledging them. If I had been on time, I would have recited these chants out loud with the other dancers followed by an invocation of the performative space through the *Ashtadigh Devata mantra*.¹⁹ Instead, I envision these eight divinities around my body and then carry out my *thatti kumbidal*—salutations to the earth beneath my feet. I walk over to Sukhi Akka, who is already in the middle of the lesson and place my fingertips on her feet, after which I touch my eyes and then my chest. The Hindu convention of greeting gurus by touching their feet is a means of acknowledging the divinity within them, but also reflects the view that their feet are the gateways to accessing knowledge and blessings. Through my *namaskar*, or prostrations, to Sukhi Akka I also *touch* all known and unknown gurus.²⁰ After some basic stretches and the *surya namaskar* (sun salutations), I join the class.

The *sollu kattu* (rhythmic syllables) '*thei ya—thei, kita thaka, thei ya—thei, kita thaka...*' echo through the studio of female dancers as we strike our feet into the tarpaulin floor. Everyone's gaze, like mine, is presumed to be in *sama dṛṣṭi* or 'equal vision' (Swami Sivananda 2002, 70), where the eyes are directed straight ahead. My mind is preoccupied with the alignment of body: '*Lengthen spine; pull torso away from pelvis; tuck in the pelvis; pull navel towards the spine; align feet and toes!*' My legs form the diamond shape of the *aramandi* and my heels begin to initiate the movement of the *thattu adavu*. Within seconds of engaging this basic step, I am reminded of Jampijimpa's statement about *speaking* to the land. Almost instantly, my intentions of trying to maintain alignment and apply technique vanish. My dancing body is no longer driven by the 'demands of the classical label' that often generates an 'overdetermined

¹⁸ Sukhi Akka is also the daughter and disciple of the late Guru Master Gopal Shetty, a pioneer who brought various traditions of Indian classical and folk dance to Malaysia in the mid-twentieth century. He is also one of the founding Gurus of TFA, where I began my classical dance journey in Bharatanatyam.

¹⁹ These are the eight divinities invoked or 'installed' around the eight spatial directions of the dance space, beginning with invoking Lord Indra, who resides in the east. However, in terms of performative spaces, the direction in which the dancer faces her main audience can be invoked as 'east'.

²⁰ Seen as a symbol of humility and respect, the *namaskar* upholds various streams of Hindu and Vedic worldviews. As a physical dialogue that occurs between corporeal entities (i.e., between persons), but also between people and sacred objects, designs and temple grounds are entwined with the worldviews of self and metaphysical. In other words, through both physical and mental actions of *namaskar*, one enters into dialogue with the cosmic self or *virat* (Swami Sivananda 2002, 70). The *namaskar* also represents a sense of utter surrender and removal of ego, which once again reiterates the non-dualism of self and metaphysical that is realised through this process.

identity-trap, where guidelines harden into rules and unshakeable expectations’ (Chatterjea 2009, 120). I am instead flooded with thoughts around speaking to the country. As my bare feet pound against the tarpaulin, I contemplate the layers of concrete and other synthetic materials that physically sit between the floor of the earth and myself. Though I dance *Nṛtta* (pure dance), my mind embraces a dialogue between my corporeal movement and the sacred temple sites where my ancestors danced centuries ago; in particular, the sacred site of the Chidambaram temple in South India. Quickly, the mental image of the temple’s granite floor transforms into the sacred soil beneath this architectural wonder. Jampijimpa’s mentorship has enabled me to perceive the creative actions of Śiva Nataraja (Śiva as the ‘King of Dance’) in a very different light [►10:00–10:23]: he *is* movement, and his movements are in eternal dialogue with his consort, Śakti, an incarnation of the Earth Mother. Was this the vision of *Tāṇḍava* (dance) given to the ancient Indian seers?

The class now does another basic *adavu*,²¹ where our bodies move to the sounds of ‘*theyyum that tha—theiyum tha*’. This time, my hands, in the gesture *katakamukha*, move away from my chest towards the floor and assume the *alapadma*. As I do these movements repeatedly, I not only see the red earth of my ancestral home, I also begin to feel as though these gestures are imbued with narratives that connect me to the sentient earth. The words of Jampijimpa spark a series of visceral encounters of dancing as *speaking* to the land. My own body becomes a site of exploration and encounter of possible dialogues between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance precepts. These dialogues are initially activated via the classical movement vocabulary of *Nṛtta* or ‘pure dance’, which finds its ancient roots in Bharatamuni’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*. [► 10:46–11:00] (as described in Chapter Three).

Nṛtta is described as incapable of *speaking* or ‘carrying out’ meaning through its gesticulations, because it is meant to be ‘void of flavour (*rasa*) and mood (*bhāva*)’ (Nandikeśvara 1997, 14). However, the ideas embedded in *Nṛtta* provide me with alternate insights. As explained in Chapter Three, its codification in Bharatamuni’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* primarily reflects 108 units of movements or *Karaṇas* that capture various aspects of nature, animals and creative forces.²²

²¹ A set of movement vocabularies adhering to similar principles of technique known as the *naattu adavu*, where the toes face the ceiling as the heel digs into the earth.

²² These *Karaṇas*, or actions, taught to Bharatamuni by Tandu (Śiva’s disciple) are the ‘life’ of *Nṛtta*, and the reason why the early dance syllabus is also referred to as the *Nṛtta Karaṇas* (Subrahmanyam 2003, 86).

Today, these combined attributes of performativity encountered in ancient India continue to filter through the current modes of *Nṛtta* among various Indian classical dance practices.

In most Indian classical dance forms practiced today, the learning commences with *Nṛtta*. The dancer is trained to understand alignment, precision, physical strength and stamina through basic movement vocabularies that do not iterate any narrative or emotions as such. Dancers are nevertheless encouraged to feel, in terms of showing joy, and therefore engage in expressing sentiments. In today's Indian classical dance repertoires, *Nṛtta* contributes to the psychological processes of *bhāva* (state of mind/ mood) and *rasa* (reciprocal taste/flavour/sentiment) between performer and audience. As in Ballet and Western Contemporary dance (Subrahmanyam 2003, 86), the movement vocabularies and techniques of *Nṛtta* communicate ideas, emotions and specific narratives.

'Dance' within Indian classical and Indigenous Australian performative domains is not a creative enactment or metaphorical symbol alone, but is a re-presentation of the exact movement of ancestors or deities. With Jampijimpa's mentorship, I explore how to *speak* and *listen* to the land through such ideas of *movement*, often envisaged through my Warlpiri skin name, *Nungarrayi*. These corporeal encounters of movements are also entwined with my intellectual, emotional, spiritual and metaphysical realisations of 'self' and the world. In the following chapter, I demonstrate how these insights led to the emergence of 'dancescapes': an innovative model through which Indigenous Australian and Indian classical performative worldviews find dialogue and exchange.

Chapter Five

Dancescapes in Dialogue—Engaging and Exploring from Within

Explicated through video and text, this chapter expands on occasions where Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dancescapes encountered dialogue. It commences with the video ‘Engaging and Exploring from Within’, followed by written passages that elaborate on the background, creative processes and reflections of the dancescapes contained in the audio-visual material. The visual and written memories that follow are articulated in three parts.

Part I—‘Being Moved’ retraces my first visit to the Warlpiri community of Lajamanu, Central Australia, in 2012, where I performed a solo Bharatanatyam item, *Nartana Gaṇapati*, at the Warnayaka Arts Centre. I describe how Jampijimpa’s teachings, together with my Warlpiri skin name, *Nungarrayi*, affect my rehearsals and dance performance.

Part II—‘Dancing Within’ features ‘Welcome to Country—Premanjali’, a collaboration between Maar Koodjal, led by Dennis Simmons and Saraswati Mahavidhyalaya, for the Swan Festival of Lights 2013, at the Supreme Court Gardens in Perth, WA. Here, I describe the emotional shifts and insights that emerged as I practiced the semi-classical movement vocabularies of *Premanjali* through an embodiment of the female divinity, Śakti.

Part III—‘Oblations to Mother Earth’ recounts my return visit to Gulkula, Arnhem Land, NT, for the Garma Festival in 2014. In this section, I recount the extempore dancescapes that were engaged by ‘speaking’ and ‘listening’ to the land, also envisioned as Mother Earth. This chapter ultimately suggests that we dance or *move* like the land moves, because land *is* movement. This explains why its movement vocabulary is reflected in numerous traditions of ‘dance’.

Engaging and Exploring from Within

Please open the 'C5_Video.mp4' file to view the 'Engaging and Exploring from Within' video, before reading this chapter. Refer to the 'Thesis_Guide.pdf' for more information.

Audio-visual Summary: Engaging and Exploring from Within

[13:43min]

Part I: Being Moved		[00:00 – 3.50min]
Location(s)	Warnayaka Arts Centre, Lajamanu Community and surrounds, NT; Canberra CBD, ACT; Point Fraser, Perth, WA	
Date(s)	2012, 2015	
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick, Neil Jupurrurla Cooke, Dr Aaron Corn	
Others	Eleanor Hobbs, Dr Yukihiro Doi, Dr Shishikura Masaya, Warlpiri Community	
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Dr Shishikura Masaya, Arun Kumar	
Audio Credits	George Fenton, Ravi Shankar, Shankar Kandasamy, O. S. Arun, Muttara Rajendran	
Photo Credits	Leanne Proberts, Dr Yukihiro Doi, Dr Aaron Corn, ESA/Hubble	

Part II: Dancing Within		[3.51–8.16min]
Location(s)	Supreme Court Gardens, Point Fraser, Swan Brewery, Canning River Foreshore, WA	
Date(s)	2013, 2015	
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Dennis Simmons and Maar Koodjal performers, Prem Sagar, Vick Riaz, Dr. Saseedaran Anandan	
Others	SMV staff and students	
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Sutharshan Kathirkamathamby, Arun Kumar, Ashwini Saseedharan, Kartikeya Sharma	
Audio Credits	Swami Shantanand Saraswati, V. Balsara	

Part III: Oblations to Mother Earth [8.17–13.43min]	
Location(s)	Gulkula, Arnhem Land, NT; Pelican Point, Trigg Beach, Perth, WA
Date(s)	2014, 2015
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Dhanggal Gurruwiwi, Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick
Others	Garma bungul performers, Daniel Wilfred
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Arun Kumar
Audio Credits	Sidha Pandian, Garma bungul performers

Part I: Being Moved

Milpirri Metaphors

Shortly before I travel to Lajamanu for the Milpirri Festival (2012) [►01:00–01:08], I receive a call from Jampijimpa and research assistant Leanne Proberts requesting me to perform an Indian classical dance for the Warlpiri community. Having agreed, I decide on the invocatory item, *Nartana Gaṇapati*.¹

The festival's intercultural vision was extensively discussed and shared with many ANU students during Jampijimpa's residency in Canberra [►00:19–00:40]. For him, Milpirri is an important platform to encourage people, especially young people, to engage with the Warlpiri pedagogy of *Ngurra-kurlu*. Creatively directed by Tracks Dance Company, the festival presents innovative dialogues between 'traditional' songlines and dance moves with hip-hop and contemporary dance routines'. These are engaged by both the Warlpiri and non-Indigenous Australians, young and old. Jampijimpa also highlights that the festival is about coming together to resolve differences and move forward as one nation:

Milpirri is really a metaphor for bringing *Kardiya* [non-Indigenous Australians] and *Yapa* [Indigenous Australians] together. It is the hot air rising and cold air falling that makes the thunderhead or ceremony cloud

¹ This classical item in the southern Indian style of Bharatanatyam was written and composed by Swamiji in the late 1970s and performed by the pioneer students of TFA in the early 1980s. Since then, both the musical score and choreography have changed, but the lyrics remain the same.

so full of rage and lightning thrashing; ... The moment where these two different knowledges clash: 'how can you understand me, you are so different?' These two, the cold air and the hot are, are trying to adjust to each other, and it isn't easy. When the hot air rises, and cold air falls, it's about adjusting to one another; a disagreement then an agreement after. But after the big storm, when the hot air and cold air meet, after it settles down, that's when it gives birth to this cloud called *Milppirri*. (Patrick 2015, 122)

The Milpirri Festival's underlying intercultural metaphors of negotiating difference and resonance also affect my creative process of reworking and reprising my dance offering in Lajamanu before the big event. These nuances are further sought and framed through my Warlpiri skin name, *Nungarayyi*.

Creative Process

In Lajamanu, Jampijimpa, his wife Remeika Napangardi and some other family members welcome the ANU students and staff with whom I arrive. We are taken to Warnayaka Arts,² our temporary living quarters for the next few days. After setting up my swag, I wander out to the front porch where I am to perform the following week. I stand in the middle of the uneven cement floor and start to get a feel for the space.

The process of re-choreographing the *Nartana Gaṇapati* officially begins as I listen to my audio track on repeat. This allows me to absorb all aspects of the song, tempo, rhythms, melody and narrative. Though I am not physically executing the movements, I mentally rehearse the dance in my mind. The sounds, movements, people and nature around me infiltrate my senses and impose upon my creativity. As I gradually start reworking the dance, I realise that this artistic process has the potential to 'speak to the land' or country, because to choreograph effectively, one needs to fully engage with the movements and gestures that connect to the sentient earth. As a result, the creative process reveals itself as a method of inquiry and unearthing of knowledge embedded in dance.

² The Lajamanu community's Art Centre.

As I listen to the music of *Nartana Gaṇapati*, my intentions of moving through space are deeply connected to the performative worldviews introduced by Jampijimpa, the Wāgilak of Ngukurr and other Yolŋu of Arnhem Land. Simultaneously, my existing Hindu perspective of invoking the metaphysical through dance is brought to my consideration of choreography. Intermingling with this creative conversation between cultural ideas of *speaking* to and dancing upon animate country, is my personal relationship with Jampijimpa, his relatives and others in the community, through my relationship to them as *Nungarrayi* [►00:48–01:00].

From the moment I step onto the soil of Lajamanu, I am not only greeted and introduced by Jampijimpa as *Nungarrayi*, but also by others who embrace me into their Warlpiri kinship system. The ‘choreography’ of *Ngurra-kurlu* leaves me to work through my relationships and responsibilities with people as well as the living country. This is no longer a classroom activity. Being referred to as *Nungarrayi* and seeing others who share this skin name invokes in me a sense of belonging to people as well as places [►01:41–01:48].

The creative process of *Nartana Gaṇapati* is influenced by ways of listening, thinking and feeling and being responsible with knowledge about country. ‘Something will come to you if you are quiet enough to take notice. Keeping your body still and using your senses is the way to know the world’ (Hokari 2011, 91). Through this silence of ‘paying attention’ to the movements around me (91), I continue to re-work the *Nartana Gaṇapati*.

Performing a solo also means that I have the freedom to follow my creative impulses and explore and change the choreography at any given time. Attempting to improvise and surrender to the music, the lyrics and the image of the elephant-faced deity Gaṇeśa, I engage the dancescape. My form begins to *listen* to the energies surrounding me and through this process I observe a subtle dialogue between the mind, emotions, intellect and the metaphysical. The latter is infused in, but also acts *as*, the movement—my body and the breathing landscape.

A drive through the different parts of Warlpiri near Lajamanu with local Warlpiri artist Neil Jupurrurla Cooke [►00:40–00:47] also adds to my experience of the dancescape. A mental image of the reddish-orange plateau spiritually associated with my skin name *Nungarrayi* [►02:34–02:37] continues to appear to and affect me. I do not have any answers, just

overwhelming emotions that keep emerging. In this way, my movements are now charged with my relationships to the Warlpiri country adopted via my kin/skin positioning.

As I allow my body to 'speak' freely, I find a framework within which I can improvise. While both my dance style and movement vocabulary reflect the Bharatanatyam genre, my mind and emotions are motivated by Yolŋu and Warlpiri views of the world. The choreography leads me to a multifaceted engagement of *seeing, feeling, knowing, doing* and *being* through movement. While I rehearse the dance both mentally and physically over the next few days, I am increasingly preoccupied by the significance of moving within this cultural space and completely unbothered about perfecting my style and technique. As I continue to work on my solo performance, I realise that this process has enabled some sense of belonging to the Warlpiri country, its people and through that a deepened awareness of *Ngurra-kurlu*.

Performing *Nartana Gaṇapati* at Lajamanu

A community barbeque is held at the foyer of Warnayaka Arts. I hear the excitement in the voices of adults and children from inside one of the rooms in the arts centre where I am preparing for my dance recital. I sit in silence and tie my hair into a bun, placing white flowers around it. I put on very little make-up foundation, but highlight my nose and eyes with a golden eye-shadow. My eyes are drawn in the shape of fish with a black liquid liner. I then place *kumkumam*, the vermillion powder, on the centre of my forehead. I take a bit more and smear it in between the centre parting of my hair. I draw designs onto my hands and feet with a washable red marker pen. Throughout the process, I do not speak. I just listen to the audio track of the dance music on repeat. It is how my gurus trained me to get into the calm but attentive space before any dance program.

This time, the process feels different. It is as though I am getting ready for a ritual performance. I imagine that this is how my ancestors felt before they danced for religious festivals and ceremonies. I contemplate on the different designs that many Hindus, not only dancers, draw on the forehead and other parts of the body. While these designs do not explicate stories about

country as in Indigenous Australian cultural practices, they are sacred markings that reflect various aspects of divinity.³

Though not traditionally worn for Bharatanatyam performances, my costume⁴ incorporates the colour yellow affiliated with my Warlpiri skin group. My 'dancing body' only partially reflects the intense 'labor of many bodies, techniques and material objects' that authenticate the south Indian classical dance form (Srinivasan 2009, 54).⁵ I am not draped in silk with a head full of jewellery to fulfil the predominant 'immigrant diaspora community's imagination of a pre-colonial, authentic India' (68). The intention here is to immerse in something deeper than the bodily constructs of Bharatanatyam that reinforces, connects and deepens one's perception and experience of life. I recite a prayer to Mother Earth as I position my dance bells around my ankles. I then do my *namaskaram*, or prostrations to Mother Earth, by striking my feet upon the concrete grounds of the arts centre. As I perform these oblations, I start to feel a deep sense of belonging to this part of the country and to its people, who warmly welcomed me into their community. I also seek the blessings of all my gurus, as well as all the ancestors of the Warlpiri country. With these thoughts, I walk towards the foyer where Jampijimpa introduces me to the audience [►01:20–01:32].

The audience is seated in an obscure semicircle. Some people have chairs while others remaining standing. A group of children excitedly run into the foyer just in time for my performance. Everyone is silent. My palms are pressed together in *anjali*, and my feet in *sama pada* [►00:12–00:18]. The music plays faintly in the background. I close my eyes momentarily, after which my legs assume the diamond shape of the *aramandi*. My eyes gaze into the beyond as my hands present *pushpaputaha*; which for the purpose of my invocatory item represents

³ For example, the *tripundra* is the marking on the forehead that represents Śiva and is therefore worn by those who worship this deity. This design consists of three horizontal lines drawn with holy ash (made from cow dung) and a red dot or mark in the centre. Alternatively, the *Urdava Pundra*—a white 'U' with a red line in the centre—represents lord Viṣṇu. Markings that reflect both Śiva and Viṣṇu can also be drawn on the bodies of devotees.

⁴ My costume consists of a white *kurta* (loose Indian shirt), yellow salwar (pleated trousers tightened by string at the waist), and yellow dupatta (shawl) that is draped on my left shoulder and around the waist.

⁵ Srinivasan (2009) highlights provides insight into 'the intersection of labor, capital, objects, individual bodies, and collective bodies' that produce the Bharatanatyam performer (54).

floral offerings. I hear the call of the *mridangam*⁶ and I am ready to re-engage the dancescape [►01:58–02:02].

My right heel is gently placed upon the concrete floor. I continue to dance in a slow tempo that gradually increases, along with the speed and complexity of my footwork. Tiny particles of sand and dust come into dialogue with my feet. Unbeknown to me, this first dance sequence reflects a particular Warlpiri hunting movement [►02:11–02:13] (Steve Wantarri Jampijinpa Patrick, conversation with author 2012). My eyes become the windows of my conscious and subconscious states of feeling and being as I dance to the words '*Nartana Gaṇapati nādhā omkāra*'. Upon hearing this initial line of the song, I meditate upon the form of Gaṇeśa—the elephant-faced deity who dances gracefully and is also the lord of the *ganas*—Śiva's 'tribe', or devotees. He is the embodiment of 'Om', the primordial sound vibration of the cosmos [►02:03–02:31]. While the narrative is not explicitly conveyed through the movements, a range of ideas and themes emerge as the dancer continues to engage the *Nṛtta*. The culmination of words, melody and corporeal movement finds a way to invoke and affect sentiments, often beyond the literal meaning of the song text. Gaṇeśa is not engaged as a mystical deity with an elephant head, but rather as a cosmic form and energy that removes all obstacles. I move through the space with 'pure dance' movements, and attempt to *speak* to all the directions of the performance space [►02:27–02:34]. These movements embody the Indian classical dance tradition in which the *ashtadig devatas*, or deities of the eight directions, are invoked before stage performances [►02:37–02:42].

My body feels the shift of weight, the gravity and kinetic flow between my feet and the cement floor on which I dance. I offer adulations to the metaphysical through the gesture of throwing floral offerings. However, as I pronounce each of these movements, not only via *Nṛtta* but also through *Nṛtya*,⁷ thoughts of the country continue to affect my dance [►02:43–03:48].

Indigenous ideas of dancing on and about country meet alongside views of contemplating Hindu deities that represent metaphysical consciousness. These dancescapes find dialogue in

⁶ The south Indian classical drum that is played for Bharatanatyam repertoires.

⁷ *Nṛtya* is the 'expressive' aspect of Indian classical dance practice. Here, the gestures of the hands, feet, body and facial expressions are all used to specifically convey stories and invoke *bhāva* (psychological states of being/mood) and *rasa* (flavour/taste/reciprocal sentiment).

and through the solo dance. The dancescape is also influenced by my obligations to Jampijimpa. Based on our Warlpiri skin sections, he sees me as his ‘mother’. From my cultural background, he is not only my mentor, but a guru. By embracing these complex interrelationships, the solo choreography of *Nartana Gaṇapati* is presented as an *aradhana* (offering) to the Warlpiri custodians of Lajamanu.

Reflections

Although *Nartana Gaṇapati* describes various facets of lord Gaṇeśa and his parents, Śakti and Śiva, my creative senses could only perceive these personifications of the metaphysical in relation to my body’s dialogue *with* and *upon* the animate scapes of country. The Hindu concepts of the metaphysical embraced in the dance entered into dialogue with the Indigenous worldviews. *Movement* in both cultures is designed and influenced by numerous insights and encounters of the metaphysical in the land and through song—through time, space, matter and energy. These notions of the world are recounted and encountered through the ontological praxis of dance. The encounter between the invocatory item of *Nartana Gaṇapati* and Jampijimpa’s ideas about ‘speaking’ to country highlight an important worldview engaged in dance; namely, the activation of the metaphysical whereby movement vocabularies *are* the former. In other words, patterned movements of the limbs are designed effectively to punctuate the ground and slice through space. These actions and movements of the corporeal are not only symbolic anecdotes; with every motion and movement, the kinetic manifestation of dance *is* the metaphysical.

More specifically, the *essence* of dancing—by way of pressing, leaping into, digging and striking parts or all of the feet into the floor of the Earth—sheds light on how Indian classical dance genres, as *Nṛtta*, embody the metaphysical. Such movement vocabularies are thus not devoid of meaning or sentiment, but rather directly link dancers with the metaphysical. The metaphysical is also invoked and reiterated via narratives and melody, which reinforce the presence of the ancestors and deities being *performed*. From this perspective, ‘dance’ is a means of speaking to the metaphysical, because it is the language of the metaphysical. Its language is non-linear, as are many doctrines that find their revelation in Vedic scriptures—unrestrained by time and date and revealed through an ongoing link to a body of knowledge.

My gratitude to Jampijimpa is extensive because he mentored me as *Nungarayyi* and generously shared his cultural knowledge. He was also exemplary in describing the relevance of Indigenous traditional worldviews in everyday contexts of modern life. Deeply inspired by my trip to Lajamanu, I return to Perth, WA, where I continue to search for the same feeling—the same reservoir of ‘speaking’ and ‘listening’ to the sentient soil by way of dance.

A New Light

Upon returning from Lajamanu, I no longer seek to perfect movement vocabularies and techniques. I see dance in a new light. My views of performing, choreography and teaching have been influenced by my engagement of Indigenous dance traditions. The ceremonial significance of Indigenous movements that relate to the animate earth and homeland continue to infiltrate my consciousness. Whenever and wherever my bare feet dance upon the ground, I see and feel the sentient earth [▶08:59–09:04]. My practice of Indian classical and semi-classical dance forms is now charged with ontological inquiry. I contemplate the historical link with *Karaṇas*, the ancient dance syllabus of my ancestors. The dance was so important that it was carved onto temple walls around India and southeast Asia. Yet while the concept of dance as ceremony remains embedded in my cultural psyche, there are significant gaps in the reasoning behind this.

Several months pass and I remain fixated on the syntax of classical movements that denote a sense of connection to nature. Jampijimpa continues to mentor me during our meetings at university, at conferences and through telephone conversations. Around this time, I come into contact with Dennis Simmons, a Noongar cultural educator and artist who Uncle Ken Colbung introduced to me. An opportunity to bring our artistic worlds together on stage invited another innovative interaction of our dancescapescapes.

Part II: Dancing Within

The Collaborative ‘Welcome’

Dennis Simmons and I speak about the possibility of his group, Maar Koodjal, collaborating with the dancers of SMV for the upcoming Swan Festival of Lights 2013.⁸ Simmons is asked to inaugurate the festival with his traditional ‘Welcome to Country’ performance, which will be followed by SMV’s cultural invocation of the dance *Premanjali* (love-offering). While it has been suggested that the two items will seamlessly flow from one to the other, Simmons has concerns about this. However, his views completely change when he hears the audio track of the *Premanjali*, which begins with Swamiji singing the *dhyana śloka*.⁹ Referring to the *śloka* as a ‘spirit song’, Simmons agrees to bring his performance into dialogue with ours.

Simmons and I discuss the many parallels between Indian and Noongar cultures, including the use of *smoking* or fire ceremonies to cleanse and charge spaces from uninvited energies and spirits. We realise that in both cultures, leaves are used in this process, which also wards off negative vibrations. We further discuss the shared approaches to drawing sacred designs on the body, the ground and other canvases with specific colours and natural pigments. The view that the sounds of the words, stories and melodies that are expressed in song and dance are charged with ancestral and metaphysical significance is also aligned in both our performative cultures. Further, when Simmons arrives at the SMV studio for a rehearsal, my colleagues and other artists discuss the ritualistic aspects that innately exist within numerous Indian performative domains.

Described as a ‘semi-classical’ dance, *Premanjali* balances the ‘old’ with the ‘new’ as it explicates traditions into contemporary platforms. The choreography mirrors the metaphysical movements of the couple (Śiva and Śakti) through portraying binaries—of static and dynamic, the yin and yang, evolution and involution [►6.00–6.37]—that can be read and re-read through the dance. The choreography almost always triggers a feeling of the ethereal, as the dancer

⁸ The Swan Festival of Lights is an annual event hosted by Annalakshmi on the Swan and SMV to celebrate *Deepavali* in a multicultural style. In 2013, this festival was held at the Supreme Court Gardens, located on Riverside Drive, Perth, WA.

⁹ This Sanskrit verse and its translation, discussed with the concept of *Abhinaya*, are found in the ‘Conceptual and Theoretical Framework’ section of Chapter One.

performs as the metaphysical personifications of Śiva or Śakti, rather than just for these deities [►05:50–08:08].¹⁰ *Premanjali* invokes the performative space, via dancers' consciousness and *presencing* of the metaphysical. In this way, the Noongar 'Welcome to Country' ceremony beforehand poetically aligns with the concepts embedded in *Premanjali*, as both these items invoke metaphysical energies.

The attempt to seamlessly merge the 'Welcome' with the *Premanjali* shifts my attention to how *Premanjali* as an invocatory dance offering transpires as ceremony. This process of re-viewing *Premanjali* highlights how the dance itself is a powerful renewal of ancient Indian Vedic traditions. I begin to see how the dance engages in the eternal metaphysical personifications of Śakti and Śiva, and that dancing their names and forms is part of my ancestral narrative. Śakti and Śiva are the cosmic dance *and* the dancers. As Hindu god figures, they symbolise the creative evolution, preservation and dissolution of all life. This cyclic phenomenon is articulated through the inspired choreography of *Premanjali*. The root inspiration for this dance, the seed of creating a contemporary expression of the primordial beings, appears to parallel the ongoing emergence of songs, dances and designs that are *Dreamed* into being among Indigenous Australians. The cosmic pair are invoked through the choreographed implementation of *Nṛtta*—pure dance movements that are ontologically linked to the metaphysical actions and movements of Śiva and Śakti. Therefore every *moment* in every movement is replete with their spiritual essences. *Premanjali* reinvigorates cosmologies via its ontological and epistemological frame.

In terms of its choreography, the positions of the dancers, the number of couples, the costume colours and stage designs are thematically interlaced with the philosophical ideas surrounding the cosmic couple. For example, the choreography symbolises the ongoing process of creation and dissolution throughout the cosmos. This is shown through the female dancers performing as Śakti, 'appearing out of' [►06:15–06:32] and 'retreating back into' their Śiva. The costumes in white and red mirror the colours attributed to the universal pair, Śiva and Śakti, respectively. The seven couples performing on the main stage represent the seven planes of existence in

¹⁰ This dance was initially conceived and choreographed by the late Master Gopal Shetty, who with Swamiji's artistic advice and direction, brought into being a unique blend of Indian classical dance styles to project the image of the Hindu divinities Śiva and Śakti. The dance is a depiction of the whole universe, dancing through and as the divine cosmic couple.

the Vedic worldview. The single Śiva and multiple Śaktis performing at the front of the stage articulate the universal consciousness of the divine, manifesting in multiple forms [►06:34–06:44]. Most importantly, the *Premanjali* is a creative expression of *Nṛtta* that begins with the *dhyana śloka*,¹¹ through which the entire dance becomes a prayer; a ceremonial invocation to the metaphysical. I now begin to see the *Premanjali* dance as a powerful ceremony through which I retrace the creative history of the universe as per the oral histories of my ancestors. I begin to see how each of these four elements of performativity enhance and distinguish the philosophical thoughts embedded in the *Premanjali*.¹²

In this way, the *Premanjali* continues to be a public performance and a *ceremony*, through encounters of thinking, knowing, being and becoming via the corporeal experience of dance.

Practicing *Premanjali*

The subtle drone of the *tambura*¹³ and the chimes of temple bells play through the speakers at the SMV studio on this chilly spring evening. My position for this dance is stage centre. I am surrounded by six other couples on either side of and behind me. I lengthen my spine and meditate on the natural rhythm of my breath. My bare-feet have warmed up to the cold wooden floors of the rehearsal hall. I close my eyes for a few seconds and reconnect with the intention that I am she—the female goddess. For me, *Premanjali* is about becoming Śakti; the female force or energy whose counterpart is Śiva [►06:58–07:05]. The *Premanjali* music, the movements and the images of dancers on stage and in studios rehearsing are all etched into my performative psyche, and have been since I was ten years old.¹⁴ Hence, my body is extremely familiar with the flow and style of movement engaged in this dance. This time however, my experience of *Premanjali* is altered through an internal reshaping of my previous experiences of dancescape.

¹¹ As previously mentioned, this Sanskrit verse and its layered concepts are detailed in the ‘Conceptual and Theoretical Framework’ section of Chapter One.

¹² In addition, the four modes that theoretically distinguish Indian classical performances appear to naturally sync with Indigenous Australian performativity; namely, the corporeal expression of ‘dance’; various aspects of ‘music’; performative ‘ornaments’, such as make-up, visual designs, costumes, props and lighting; and the performers’ and viewers’ psyche as a result of the collective encounter.

¹³ A stringed instrument that maintains the pitch and melody during a musical item through its continuous drone.

¹⁴ Although this was a dance for adults and senior dance practitioners, I was instantly drawn to the mystical choreography and always danced behind those rehearsing for this item.

Each movement that grazes or taps the ground now reflects multiple layers of *speaking*. Even though I embody Śakti, I also see her when my feet touch the floor, for the Earth is her other *avatar* (incarnation). The mirror imaging of consciousness somehow invokes the fleeting mental and emotional states of being that are usually engaged through such embodied performance. I become an observer of my own movements, but there is no particular intent or thought about bringing myself into dialogue with the animate earth or country. There is a sense of awareness as well as detachment as I dance. The body moves, but it is not about the body, nor the movement per se. The mind also follows these movements, yet it begins to see these as the metaphysical. When mind, emotions and body together attempt to speak to the animate earth, they see something beyond these spheres of consciousness. There is no longer an incentive or meaning attached to the movement practice: Śakti occupies the entire dancescape. 'I' embrace the sense of stillness that pervades my being. Perhaps this experience is the *Nṛtta*, devoid of *bhāva* and *rasa*. There are no intentions, just movement, which continues to flow through my body. Momentarily, what *speaks* is the encounter itself—the dance and the dancer are one.

Nonetheless, notions of duality still find ways to inspire my practice of *Premanjali*. The dance steps not only remind me that I perform upon sentient earth, but also that my body swiftly moves through the ether; my eyes gaze towards an imaginary sky and even to the stars through the galaxy [►07:47–08:08]. Imagination eventually becomes an innermost reality that finds truth through dance. My arms are now the wings of the *hamsa* (swan), and I can feel it dive from a great height. But as I lift my sternum and look up at the sky, my entire being sees something different. I begin to see the flying emu—the constellation of the Milky Way visible in the night sky [►07:05–07:50]. I continue to dance, and I am almost certain that the ancient concepts of the *hamsa* and the emu in the sky are two ends of the same spectrum. Is the *parama hamsa*, the supreme swan, an abstraction of this metaphysical constellation in which our humanity resides? The more I contemplate this idea, the more I wonder whether this inspired review of my traditions stems from *Premanjali's* creative implementation of the *Nṛtta* vocabulary, or my experiences of an intercultural dance dialogue, or both.

Dancing by the Derbarl Yerrigan

The late afternoon waters of the Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River) flow about 200 metres from the festival stage. Simmons and his group, Maar Koodjal, along with the artists from SMV all hold hands as some of the dancers recite the usual invocatory *mantras* prior to performances. Simmons is not new to our Sanskrit chanting, as he has previously performed at one of our ceremonies.¹⁵ He observes and maintains his silence before getting ready to perform his ‘Welcome to Country’ just as the sun sets behind hills of Kaarta Koomba (Kings Park). The Noongar man’s cultural expressions of dance are both entertainment and the substance of ceremony. Simmons believes:

‘Dance’ is an English word, and we try to give meaning to this, but it has all sorts of different connotations and ideas that don’t really match our traditional ways and thinking. The word ‘dance’ should really be replaced with the word ‘ceremony’, the way we black fellas, including you guys and other Indigenous nations have been practicing it since time immemorial.
(Dennis Simmons, conversation with author 2013)

Sitting by the side of the stage, I watch Simmons sing and play the *kylie* (boomerang). I can see how his movements engage in ceremony, for his performance activates the space [►04:06–05:12]. Two male dancers, representing Śiva, join Simmons on stage and invoke the eight spatial quarters of the stage. Simmons walks around one of them and plays his *kylie*. Soon, the stage is flooded with female dancers, representing the energy form of Śakti. They stand with their hands held in *anjali* as Simmons weaves through them [►05:16–05:42]. The *Premanjali* music starts playing and Simmons exits the stage. The dancers continue to perform the rest of the invocatory dance. I am not on stage dancing with my community; an injury at rehearsal prevents me from participating in the collaborative performance at the festival.

Reflections

The collaborative ‘Welcome’ acknowledges our respective cultural protocols. The dialogue that occurs between our two performances is carefully woven to respect cultural boundaries. In

¹⁵ In 2006, Uncle Ken Colbung expressed his desire for his Noongar dancers to perform a special dance specifically at sunrise during one of our Hindu ceremonies at Pelican Point, Perth, WA. Dennis led this dance, which was performed on this sacred site by the Swan River.

this light, Simmons's 'Welcome to Country', through the calling of ancestral spirits, influenced the way *Premanjali* was invoked in the same performative space.

Although I did not perform at the festival or explore an improvised dialogue as initially envisaged with Simmons, the feeling of watching the dance from side stage recalled to me the feeling of *Premanjali* from within. I was indeed dancing, but without my body. My view of the stage allowed me to see the dancers' movements clearly and it was primarily by watching their movements that I too encountered *Premanjali*.¹⁶ Dance is capable of expressing themes and narratives within the mind's eye, without the physical body as its apparatus. Just as we are able to dance in our dreams while asleep, or by remembering performance routines with or without the aid of the musical score, so too is there the possibility of dancing without the body as the primary axis of knowing and being in the world.

Part III: Oblations to Mother Earth

Returning to Gulkula

In Perth, the thesis lifestyle invariably occupies my senses—read, think, write, research and re-search. The more I read, write and think about various types of Indigenous Australian dance, the more I am overcome with the desire to be amid animated bodies, vibrant rhythms and melodies. The need to explore and engage new dancescapes eventually takes me to Australia's Top End. Before I know it, I am on a plane seated next to Jampijimpa, on the way to the Garma Festival 2014.

I feel nostalgic walking the same dirt tracks as on my first trip to Gulkula in 2011. Returning to the Garma Festival brings back memories of meeting the Wägilak Yolŋu and reconsidering what it means for people to be one with their homelands. However, this year is even more important for me, as both my Wägilak and Warlpiri mentors are attending the event. Daniel and David Wilfred are showcasing their popular collaboration with the Australian Art Orchestra's jazz

¹⁶ Susan Leigh Foster (2011, 2) examines the terms, 'choreography', 'kinesthesia' and 'empathy' to determine 'how dance summons its viewers into an empathic relationship with it'. She argues that 'any notion of choreography contains, embodied within it, a kinesthesia, a designated way of experiencing physicality and movement that, in turn, summons other bodies into a specific way of feeling towards it' (2).

musicians, and Jampijimpa is speaking at the Garma Key Forum [►11:39–12:16]. As some of the key people who encouraged me to explore cross-cultural paradigms of dance, our meeting on Gulkula reflects on many levels my (ongoing) learning about the relationships between dance and sentient country.

Oblations to the Earth Mother

It is about 4.45am and I finally decide to leave my tent and go for a walk. Within a few minutes, I reach the escarpment by the Key Forum. Here, I am moved by the distant sound of the Arafura waves and the blue-black sky filled with stars. I feel an impulse to pay homage to the earth by performing the dance ritual of the *thatti kumbidal* [►09:08–09:20]. No *sollukattu* or rhythmic phrases are recited either verbally or mentally. My body assumes its natural coordinates: hands in *katakāmukah*, feet in *paśva* and my legs deepen in the diamond shape of the *aramandi*. As my feet hit the ground one after the other, the *Prabhāta Bhūmi śloka*¹⁷ floods my senses [►08:40–09:07]:

‘*samudra vasane devī*’— Oh divine Mother, clad in ocean,
‘*parvata stana maṇḍale*’—whose bosom is none other than the
mountains and hills,
‘*viṣṇupatni namastubhyam*’—I prostrate to you oh wife of lord Vishnu,
‘*pādasparśam kṣamasvame*’—and ask forgiveness for touching you with
me feet.

As the *śloka* resounds in my ears, I deepen my stance and arrive close to the ground with my legs turned out in *muzhumandi*. My fingers reach out to the soft earth, after which I gently place them upon my closed eyelids. I conclude my homage with my hands in *anjali*.

I am curious about what inspired me to carry out the *thatti kumbidal*. Was this my *subterranean* body or psyche responding to the animate country? Am I intuitively *listening* to the land? Or is this experience the result of a subconscious choice to reclaim the intimate connection between dance and the earth that is ever-present in my Hindu culture? Perhaps I ‘just have to trust, from the inside out, what the body is telling [me] ... what the body is teaching

¹⁷ A Sanskrit poetic verse in praise of Mother Earth. It is traditionally recited in the morning as one’s feet (first) touch the ground.

[me]' (Debenham and Debenham 2008, 4), because the 'body knows. It is aware, it perceives, it processes, sorts through incoming stimuli, filters it and makes judgments on what course of action it should take' (3). For the next hour, I stand by the escarpment and absorb the silence of the early hours of the dawn [►08:26–08:41], yet my mind continues to think of the earth floor, the Earth Mother—*Bhūmā Devī*.¹⁸

The *Bungul* Grounds

Over the next two evenings, I watch various groups of Yolngu showcase their *bungul* [►09:57–11:36]. Their movements reveal a technique of 'bodies' conversing with metaphysical landscapes. Gradations of such performative realisations flood the *bungul* grounds. One young dancer stands out from the rest: wearing his red-themed attire, he rhythmically stamps the ground, leaving trails of red dust clouds behind him [►11:14–11:36]. He is aware that the crowd is supporting and enjoying his performance. His facial expressions, coupled with his exertion, are powerful to watch. I cannot help but reflect upon the dancescape in front of me and my own dialogical encounters between Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance. I watch as my Wägilak friend and performer, Daniel, spontaneously dances with his Yolngu relatives [►11:53–11:04]. In this way, the festival is charged with a sense of pride and belonging to the land and country of Yolngu ancestors.

Dancing in Gulkula

Seated on the periphery of the performance grounds, I am immersed in the expressions of Yolngu dance and music. This evening, the audience is also invited to join in for a part of the *bungul*. The Yolngu are about to perform the 'sunset dreaming'—a traditional songline popularised in the 1990s by the band Yothu Yindi's hit song '*Djäpana*', sung by Mandawuy Yunupingu. Without hesitation, I rush towards the performance grounds [►13:03–13:07]. Having watched the Yolngu women perform the dance previously, I have some knowledge of their movements, including the swaying of hips, waving of the palm and slight inclination of the upper body in cohesion with the rhythmic momentum of the feet on the Earth's floor. As I step my feet into the earth, I feel a sense of being on this landscape and with its people. I keep

¹⁸ *Bhūmā* is Earth and *Devī* indicates the feminine aspects of divinity. However, the concept of 'Devī' in various Hindu scriptures is also related to the innate manifestations of kinetic energy abounding in the cosmos. She is the energy that pulsates and activates all creatures and elements. She is the kinesthesia that drives the entire world and beyond.

flicking the earth between my feet and feel an intimate connection to this soil. Together with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, I dance my goodbyes to the setting sun [▶13:07–13:30].

The next morning, I am filled with the urge to dance once more. My need to move was definitely inspired by continuously seeing, hearing and sensing Gumatj relationships to country and ancestors via dance. This inspiration leads to another dancescape. Various parts of my feet dig into, brush against and punctuate the red dust of Gulkula. The sensation of dancing upon the warm red Earth with my bare feet is a reminder that this is a form of speaking to the land [▶12:36–12:55]. The *Nṛtta* that emerges from my corporeal movements is driven by my intimate and somewhat ineffable associations with Mother Earth. As I engage and explore the dancescape between the *Bhūmī* (Earth) and myself, I am reminded of her name and form as ‘Devī’, which in various Hindu scriptures symbolises the kinetic energy that abounds in the cosmos. The term Devī also indicates the feminine aspect of divinity. She is the energy that pulsates and activates all creatures and elements. She *is* the kinesthesia that drives the entire world and beyond. From a theoretical and philosophical perspective, in Indian classical dance, *she* is also considered the stage, or rather the ‘spirit of the stage’ upon which performances are carried out. In this way, the Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance cultures do not merely perceive the Earth as a metaphorical stage; it is the metaphysical entity upon which we dance and carry out ceremonial activities. Inspired by these ideas, I continue to improvise and acknowledge the floor, allowing my sentiments to flow through and find form through movement.

Reflections

In returning to these sacred grounds, I was reminded that there is much more to learn from Indigenous peoples’ interactions with the natural world. The embrace of country as sentient is not merely a phenomenon that aligns with modern views of environmental ecology. Indigenous people see themselves, their histories and their home in all aspects of the environment. Nature does not merely exist outside human relationships but reinforces all aspects of human consciousness, for it is inseparable from one’s identity. In this way, dance is important to cultivating and restoring Indigenous cultural identities. Perpetuation of ancestral traditions is therefore critical to maintaining one’s mental and physical health and wellbeing.

The power of these intimate connections between people, their land and home country is deeply etched into my performative psyche. The dance oblations to the Earth Mother, the *thatti kumbidal*, have now become a permanent reminder of these sacred ancestral connections [►08:56–09:20]. Further, my engagement and exploration of these dancescapes leads me to believe that my Indian ancestors must have encountered dance as a spiritual hinge between themselves and the animate country. These were ‘same but different’ ideologies that linked people to places by stories animated through a range of movement vocabularies and gestures.

While my dialogic encounter of dancescapes unearths numerous ontologies, I also embrace ‘dance’ as a fundamental expression and experience of joy. Based on this understanding, the following chapter predominantly features three Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes in dialogue that have been captured on film.

Chapter Six

Dancescapes in Dialogue—Improvised Innovations

Dance is my life. Whether I am teaching, learning, performing, choreographing or exploring cross-cultural dialogues on stage or in a studio environment, dance is my joy. However, the more I explore dance via the lens of dancescapes, the more I am convinced that the joy produced through movement, music and the meeting of people does not always need to be penned, examined and explained in terms of its histories and geographies. This chapter comprises three videos, without any written passages, that explore the dancescapes between Indigenous Australian artists and me. The aim is to experience and share traditions of performance for the mere joy it creates. Nothing more. Yet through these dialogues, there also evolves connectedness between our cultures and further insights and future artistic possibilities. The focus remains on how the dancescapes creatively *speak* to each other, and how such cross-cultural dialogues are equally vital for renewing history, culture and relationships between people and places, in contemporary society.

A Dialogue in South Perth

A casual meeting between friends by the South Perth foreshore results in interactive learning that eventually brings Yolŋu and Indian classical dances to dialogue. Filmed in the summer of 2015, this meeting sparks creative dialogue between Yolŋu performers Terrance Dhumbarpar Guyula and Gilbert Dhamarranji and SMV performers Pavan Hari, Sivakumar Balakrishnan and myself. While Terry and Sivakumar improvise on their *yidaki* and *tabla*, respectively, Gilbert and I dance. Pavan plays the harmonium and dances.

Please open video file 'C6_1Video.mp4' to view 'A Dialogue in South Perth'. Refer to the 'Thesis_Guide.pdf' for further instructions.

Audio-visual Summary: A Dialogue in South Perth

[5.02min]

Location(s)	South Perth Foreshore, Perth, WA
Date(s)	2015
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Terry Dhumbarpar Guyula, Gilbert Dhamarranji, Pavan Kumar Hari, Sivakumar Balakrishnan
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Sivakumar Balakrishnan

Engaging Dancescapes with Curtis Taylor

On a relaxed summer's day in 2016, the talented Martu artist Curtis Taylor and myself explore the themes and ideas between our cultural dance forms. While Curtis does not see himself as a performer, he generously shares his knowledge of his cultural practices in a creative realm. Our spontaneous improvisations of the dancescapes take place by Lake Monger, Perth, WA. (A section of this footage is interlaced with images of me dancing in the SMV studio, Beaufort Street, Perth, WA.)

Please open video file 'C6_2Video.mp4' to view 'Engaging Dancescapes with Curtis Taylor'. Refer to the 'Thesis_Guide.pdf' for further instructions.

Audio-visual Summary: Engaging Dancescapes with Curtis Taylor

[4.30min]

Location(s)	Lake Monger; SMV, Perth, WA
Date(s)	2016
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Curtis Taylor
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Curtis Taylor
Audio Credits	Sidha Pandian, Curtis Taylor, Shankar Kandasamy, Sasidaran Natarajan, Kanagamani Vijayendra, Muttara Rajendran

Dialoguing Traditions

After almost two years, Daniel Wilfred and I reconnect through our dance and music. Our meeting in Melbourne in 2017 inspires a dialogue between the Wāgilak and Bharatanatyam performance traditions. David Wilfred also joins the artist interaction that takes place in the living room of an apartment hotel.

Please open video file 'C6_3Video.mp4' to view 'Dialoguing Traditions'. Refer to the 'Thesis_Guide.pdf' for further instructions.

Audio-visual Summary: Dialoguing Traditions

[5.40min]

Location(s)	Oaks Southbank, Melbourne, Australia
Date(s)	2017
Featuring	Sidha Pandian, Daniel Wilfred, David Wilfred
Video Credits	Sidha Pandian, Samuel Curkpatrick

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Unearthing Salient Traditions upon 'Shared Soil'

It has been more than two decades since I first witnessed Noongar elder Uncle Ken and my guru Swamiji embrace the deep cultural connections borne of the memory of ancient Gondwanaland. That experience inspired my research and review of the ontologies embedded in Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices, and posed them as traditions of movement that have emerged upon the shared landscapes of Gondwana over countless millennia.

In this final chapter, I present the overall thesis conclusions that have emerged from my performative research encounter with the dancescapescapes in dialogue. I initially restate the research motivation, after which I draw out the conclusions from my performative inquiries in each of the thesis chapters. I then address the thesis hypotheses that there are significant resonances between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical worlds of dance. In particular, the thesis concludes that these affinities reside in movement vocabularies and techniques that rhythmically connect dancers' feet to the earth, serving to presence deep-seated ontologies. The theoretical framework and lens of *abhinaya* is described as an ontological guide that naturally frames both dance genres. The view that the culture of movement among Indigenous practices resides in and *as* the animate country and cosmos substantially extends Sklar's 'five premises for a culturally sensitive approach to dance'. Finally, the multi-source research method and conceptual framework of 'dancescapescapes in dialogue' are proposed as being an original contribution to dance pedagogy.

Reflections on Re-searching Dance

As an Indian classical dancer residing in Australia, life experiences continuously shape my performative lenses of 'dance'. Relationships and deep connections with people, places and events, both consciously and subconsciously, contribute to my understanding and articulations of corporeal movement, technique and choreography. These encounters are also influenced by the fact that I was raised and now live in the Indian diaspora in Australia. As such, my identity and cultural connections have often come into question. Where do I belong? What is my tradition? But most of all: 'Why dance?' What is it about dancing that is so unique that it has been central to the ceremonial spheres of Indigenous civilisations since time immemorial? As I have asked these questions, I have grown equally concerned that Indigenous values and ideas, including those embedded in Indian classical performances, remain blurred by existing frameworks of imperialism. The journey that began on the banks of the Derbarl Yerrigan, in Perth, WA, eventually changed my views of dance and its deep connections to the sentient country, land and earth.

Inspired by elders and gurus, past and present, I gradually began re-searching through dance. A unique sense of belonging and solidarity emerged as I re-imagined walking, dancing and breathing upon the 'animate earth' (Harding 2011). I realised the earth beneath my feet felt intrinsically linked to my ancestral homeland, India. I started to examine how Indigenous perceptions of time, space and movement are understandable through the agency of performance. To capture and analyse these moments of innovative dialogue and insight, this 'Thesis by Creative Works' has drawn on multiple research methods to share personal experiences, performances and re-present Indigenous cultural knowledge embedded in dance.

The following sections draw out the creative insights and arguments presented in each of the previous chapters, and explain how they contribute to the overall research conclusions.

Research Summary and Conclusions

The thesis Prelude described the interaction and bond between Swamiji and Uncle Ken, who celebrated the historic links between the Indigenous peoples and sentient soils of India and Australia. It also related my early recollections of dancing on the Noongar *boodjar* (country). These stories provided the research background and ‘set the scene’ for the performative inquiries that were related in subsequent chapters.

Chapter One introduced the academic guidelines required for a ‘Thesis by Creative Works’ and provided a brief description of the geographical, genetic and other cultural connections between the Gondwana countries of India and Australia. The chapter also outlined the idea of the ‘same but different’ knowledges engaged in Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices. While these are two diverse dance genres, it was reiterated that they nonetheless evolved from ‘shared soil’. Thus, the thesis research questions were:

- What are the performative characteristics and ontological foundations of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance?
- Are there any significant ontological and performative resonances between the two dance practices? If yes, what are they?
- What are the possibilities of exchange, improvisation and collaboration between the two dance practices?
- How do the ‘dancescapes in dialogue’ express and renew traditional worldviews in contemporary performative domains?

Next, an overview was given of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and multi-source approach used in this thesis.

To summarise the findings of the thesis, it is revealed that the different movement vocabularies and techniques encountered in Indigenous Australian performative domains resonate strongly with the Indian classical aspect of *Nr̥tta*, or ‘pure dance’. Further, these two movement vocabularies and techniques are manifestations of the metaphysical. Embedded within these dances is the ontological premise that intimately connects people to their animate home country.

The thesis additionally argues that the Indigenous histories and memories that are embedded in landscapes are revitalised through culturally informed physical movements. Such corporeal articulations are argued to be the tangible presencing of the metaphysical ancestors. Accordingly, the thesis describes how the body is posed as a conduit through which the movement patterns and vocabularies themselves are the catalysts of metaphysical realisation.

When understood this way, dance is presented as an important vehicle through which ancestral bodies of lore are nurtured and re-embodied. Here, the thesis substantially extends Deidre Sklar's (2009, 170) view that 'ideologies of embodiment as well as techniques of the body are encoded in culturally specific ways, in different systems of writing', determining that within Indigenous cultural domains, dance is a non-linear performative expression capable of writing and rewriting histories and cultural identities.

These concluding insights arise from the research evidence, analysis and creative exposition presented in Chapters Two through Six of this thesis, which are summarised below.

Chapter Two was written in two parts. The initial section considered numerous choreologists' perspectives of dance, arguing that it is an expression of the corporeal that enables performers' embodiment of the 'other' through processes of being and becoming. It was further proposed that dance is a direct mechanism for acquiring and explicating cultural knowledge. From a metaphysical perspective, the kinetic patterns abounding in the cosmos are also described as dances.

The second half of the chapter examined Indigenous Australian notions of histories and cosmologies of Dreaming, which are based on non-linear perceptions of time. It was further argued that music, dance, designs and sacred objects are powerful agents capable of presencing and re-presencing Indigenous histories and historical figures.

The chapter then demonstrated how Indigenous traditional worldviews and performative domains were challenged during the British colonisation of Australia. The subsequent rise of Indigenous self-determination and the cultural empowerment that was advocated through dance was then outlined. In conclusion, the chapter argued that the innovative articulation of traditional ideas via contemporary Indigenous performative domains is important to maintaining Indigenous cultural ideologies and identities in this increasingly global society.

Chapter Three was also written in two parts. The first segment examined the oral and written aspects of knowledge transmission in ancient India, leading to a discussion about the beginnings of *Nāṭya* (dance, drama and music) as per Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, one of the foundational scriptures on dramaturgy in which all current Indian classical dance genres find their roots. This section also outlined how the performance syllabus of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* altered in its form and purpose in the past millennia. The chapter detailed how the British colonisation of India and subsequent independence of the nation altered numerous Indian performative domains and aided the development of multiple 'classical' Indian dance genres. Importantly, it was argued that such shifts in performative practices do not necessarily negate or undermine their ontological foundations. It was then further demonstrated that, in spite of the evolution of dance practices and ongoing artistic hybridisations, Indian classical dance vocabularies potentially continue to embrace Vedic-Hindu ways of being and knowing.

The chapter next presented several accounts of Indian and Indigenous Australian dance collaborations, highlighting the cultural and traditional affinities encountered by the artists. The centrality of these intercultural forms of exchange to the concept of 'dancescapes in dialogue' was then briefly discussed. In conclusion, it was posed that, in the Indian and Indigenous Australian performance cultures, dance is a method of both presenting and practicing history.

Chapters Four, Five and Six presented the 'creative work' element of this thesis, through both written text and videos. They present my participation (solely and with others) in a series of dance dialogues between Indian and Indigenous Australian dance practices. Using this creative methodology, I aimed to explicate the underlying meanings, shared language and ontologies embodied in and through the dance dialogues themselves.

Chapter Four, entitled 'An Awakening', commenced with a video of the same name. Both the visual and written narratives artistically conveyed and reviewed the early Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dances in dialogue. These were communicated in three parts.

Part I recounted my travels to the remote community of Ngukurr, NT. It focused on the initial performative shifts that occurred as I witnessed Wägilak Yolŋu traditions of *manikay* (song) and *bungul* (dance). The chapter showed how my perspectives of Indian classical dance altered

as I immersed myself in the Yolŋu performance cultures. Resonating cultural and philosophical ideas, together with common movement techniques and vocabularies, were identified among Wägilak Yolŋu and the Indian classical dance forms of Bharatanatyam and Odissi. The resonating dance codes were further associated with the *Nṛtta* (pure dance), described in Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The deep connectedness between the Wägilak Yolŋu and their home country through embodied performances of creative ancestors were also examined.

Chapter Four, Part II detailed the impact of my first visit to the sacred grounds of Gulkula, NT, during the Garma Festival 2011. The ways in which Yolŋu and other Indigenous Australian traditions of dance facilitated and renewed ties between people and their ancestral homelands were discussed and captured through my recollection of a Yolŋu inmate's emotional performance on his home country. The striking affinities between Indian classical and Yolŋu movement vocabularies were again also examined.

The deepening of my Indian classical dance ontologies, inspired by Warlpiri elder Steve Wantarri Jampijimpa Patrick, was the focus of Chapter Four, Part III. Jampijimpa's cultural pedagogy of *Ngurra-kurlu*, or 'home within', together with his views of *speaking* to the land by way of dancing were discussed by drawing on the 'same but different' dance attributes within both Warlpiri and Indian classical performative expressions. The formation of the model and concept of the 'dancescape' through my comparative re-viewing of the contemporary movement vocabularies of *Nṛtta* in Bharatanatyam was also detailed. It was concluded that both Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices embrace performative ontologies that are guided through culturally informed ways of *speaking* and *listening* to animate landscapes.

As with the previous chapter, Chapter Five, entitled 'Engaging and Exploring from Within', commenced with a video of the same name. Both the visual and written components of the chapter were again expressed in three parts.

Part I reviewed my choreography and performance of *Nartana Gaṇapati* at the Warnayaka Arts Centre in Lajamanu, Central Australia. Here, I explored how dancescapes were dialogued through my Warlpiri skin/kinship identity as *Nungarrayi*. I described how Indigenous Australian views of dancing on, about and as country directly dialogued with similar Vedic-Hindu

personifications of the universe. This exploration of dance responded directly to my hypothesis that movement vocabularies and techniques are powerful explications of the metaphysical form. Through this lens, *Nṛtta*, which is generally considered devoid of *bhāva* (psychological states of being) and *rasa* (reciprocated sentiments, derived from the former), was reinforced as a pure dance expression capable of conveying both of these qualities. Further, it was deemed a versatile link between the dancer and the universe, and between individuals and ancestral country, where the melodic and rhythmic impulses fuelling the corporeal movements are seen to engage with the metaphysical ‘home within’, just as occurs in *Ngurra-kurlu*.

Chapter Five, Part II described the ‘Welcome to Country—*Premanjali*’ that was performed at the Swan Festival of Lights 2013 in Perth, WA. The heightened emotions that emerged through continued explorations of *speaking* and *listening* to the land during performance rehearsals were analysed. Further, the insights revealed through my studio rehearsals of the semi-classical dance item *Premanjali* were examined; for example, the dance movement denoting the flying swan was re-viewed as the flying emu—the Milky Way constellation, which is home to our solar system. Also described was the unexpected experience of speaking to the land *as* the land itself, triggered through an embodied realisation of the Hindu female divinity Śakti. These performative experiences presented dance as a powerful creative conduit that reinvigorates and reveals traditional knowledge through innovative means of knowing and being.

Chapter Five, Part III related my return visit to Gulkula, NT, for the Garma Festival 2014. Details of the extempore dancescapes that I and others engaged in were described, identifying the nuances of dancing upon, for and *as* the animate earth. The millennia-old movement vocabularies and techniques in Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance practices were identified as synonymous with the metaphysical landscape, making them powerful tools of the sentient earth or country.

Chapter Six consisted of three videos capturing my final creative improvisations and exchanges with various Indigenous Australian performers. These dancescapes were enacted and explored to enjoy the synergy between Indian classical and Indigenous Australian dance and music. The choice of presenting this chapter visually, with minimal text, was to highlight that dance is fundamentally an experience of joy. The viewer was therefore offered the opportunity to

simply witness the innovative dancescapes in dialogue without having to analyse any underlying performative ontologies and epistemologies that may or may not be apparent in these videos.

Final Conclusions

The following sections present the conclusions that have emerged from my research and performative encounter of the dancescapes in dialogue.

Re-viewing *Nṛtta*

The different movement vocabularies and techniques encountered in Indigenous Australian performative domains resonate directly and strongly with the Indian classical aspect of *Nṛtta*, or 'pure dance'. The most obvious affinities identified are the different types of rhythmic encounters between dancers' bare feet and the earth, often against the backdrop of wooden percussion. Among these, the basic unit of movement known as the *thattu adavu*, learned in the southern Indian classical dance genre of Bharatanatyam, is also prominent among Indigenous Australian dance practices. Importantly, this argument is not based on my research with current forms of Indigenous dance practice alone, but was confirmed through reviewing historic drawings and video documentation.

The physical position engaged during this *thattu adavu*, referred to as the *aramandi* or *ardhamandala*, also resonates with Indigenous Australian dance traditions. The philosophy of the 'mandala', or sacred geometry or symbol of the cosmos, is integral to this position. However, what is significant about the term '*ardhamandalam*' is that while *ardha* refers to 'half' or 'the other part', it also means 'country', 'region' or 'place'. Further, like many other Vedic works in Sanskrit, it is said to have multiple meanings because of the layered knowledges embedded in this ancient language in which multiple sacred doctrines were written. It was concluded that dance has, for millennia, facilitated the ways in which the ancient societies of both India and Indigenous Australia connected to the land.

Numerous other movement vocabularies shared between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance expressions are identified in this thesis. The dance steps that appear to differ, such as the gentle swaying of female hips among Yolŋu, nevertheless fundamentally reiterate

the ancient performance styles of *Nṛtta* as codified by Bharatamuni. While not exactly ‘swinging’ the hips, graceful manipulations of the hip, as well as other dance steps, are featured in Dr Padma Subrahmanyam’s scholarly research and performative revitalisation of the 108 *Nṛtta Karaṇas* enumerated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Embedded in these shared movement vocabularies and techniques is the ontological premise that intimately connects people to their animate *home*, or country.

Ontological Traditions

Indigenous Australian and Indian classical performative domains engage in ‘same but different’ methods of *speaking* to the land. This speaking is articulated by way of corporeal movements and techniques. Traditionally revealed through intuitive experiences—through the Dreaming, or the ‘hearing’ of the Vedas—the language of dance does not simply explicate ancestral narratives and other significant histories. Its method of speaking to the sentient land or country is more catalytic in its impact or energy; specifically, dance invites encounters of being and becoming the ‘other’. In other words, the body is an imperative frame or conduit of correspondence, between self and place or spaces, and between self and sentient scapes. Dances *upon* the country or the earth involve more than mimicry. These movement vocabularies *are* the tangible manifestations of the metaphysical. Such dance practices not only facilitate ways of *speaking* and *listening* to the land, but also ways of being and becoming the land. Therefore, dance is country, and country is dance.

From this view, the punctuating of feet upon the animate grounds brings immediacy to the processes of embodying the metaphysical. The thesis thus concludes that it is in this way that Indigenous Australian and Indian classical movement traditions elicit space-time relationships that activate oral histories, narratives and other ideas ‘everywhere and everywhen’ (Bach 1970, 79).

***Abhinaya*: An Ontological Compass**

The concept of dancescapes in dialogue also sheds light on the theoretical framework of *abhinaya*, or the four modes of performative communication mentioned in Bharatamuni’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*; namely, *angika*, *vacika*, *aharya* and *satvika*. These elements are not solely driven by their performance attributes. The human body (*angika*) as well as visual designs and props

(*aharya*) are framed by sacred geometries and collectively intercede with powerful sound vibrations in chants, narratives and musicality (*vacika*). These interwoven modes of communication determine the union between performers and the metaphysical 'other'; that is, pureness or stillness of the psyche, spirit and other ineffable states of awareness (*satvika*).

The theoretical framework of *abhinaya* is not just a tangible performative guide; it is an important ontological compass that frames Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance practices.

Indigenous Movement

Sklar's 'five premises for a culturally sensitive approach to dance' suggest that cultural knowledges are embedded and realised through corporeal movement. Expanding on this insight, my research proposes that dance movements engaged within Indigenous performative spaces are imbued with cultural information, as they already exist *in* the landscape or country. Such 'movements' are manifestations of sentient country and cosmos.

The thesis also suggests that while such 'traditions' of movement ontology remain attached to tradition, they are never static in their artistic expression and practice. The perpetuation of these movements, along with their deeper traditions, may indeed be dependent on their renewal via contemporary creative practice and synergy with other cultures of dance movement.

Dancescapes in Dialogue: An Original Contribution

The multi-source research method and conceptual framework of the 'dancescape' and its 'dialogic' mode provided a unique platform to simultaneously conduct research and engage in creative dance innovation. This model brought together the cultural knowledges disseminated by elders, gurus and leaders; oral histories, scriptures and relevant dance literature; several periods of field-based research with Indigenous dancers; and a suite of theoretical and conceptual frames suited for this intercultural research. Empirical findings and ideas were communicated and further reviewed through the method of autoethnography. This tool assisted in the recounting and re-presentation of performative insights and experiences via a combination of written text, images and film. This methodology helped convey and analyse my research opinions and experience through the lens of 'a dancer'.

Importantly, my body was employed as a primary site of knowing, seeing, feeling and conducting research. As a result, diverse corporeal, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, metaphysical and other aspects of dance were unpacked and examined. Through this layered approach and expression of the dancescapes, the thesis also conveys 'my' performative truths. The same methodological device enabled me to identify and explore the multiple personal, political and sociocultural domains explored in relation to dance. Using this innovative method and framework, the research unearthed age-old ontologies and epistemologies of *movement*.

While the thesis argues that traditional worldviews of dance may continue to remain the same, it also strongly suggests that their articulations in the modern world invite translations. Further, it determines that the researching of these traditional knowledges in contemporary performative spaces can be powerfully explicated via practice-led/as research, written text and 'the visual'. Therefore, the thesis demonstrates that the transdisciplinary and collaborative research model of the 'dancescapes' and its faculties of 'dialogue' are able to generate a 'literacy' of new knowledge production with regard to performative ontologies and epistemologies. Arguably, this research process also serves as a method of deconstructing and decolonising western constructs of the cultural ideas and values intrinsic to Indigenous dance practice.

For this reason, the thesis argues that the 'dancescapes' and performative 'dialogues' uniquely contribute to a revitalised understanding of the worldviews and philosophies underlying Indigenous dance. Moreover, this 'Thesis by Creative Works' has brought together an innovative design and pedagogy for the intercultural learning and dissemination of dance and related improvisation.

Conclusion

The 'dancescape in dialogue' is a conceptual and performative lens that breaks away from the colonial ideas of performance as 'exotic' and entertainment alone. It highlights the possibilities and vernacular of knowledge exchange and creativity in contemporary spaces. From my own diasporic experience, the 'dancescape' facilitates the potential performative re-emergence of Gondwanaland.

As such, my research shows that there *are* significant affinities between Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dance styles. The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings in this research are valuable to dance researchers and practitioners alike. More importantly, it fills the gap in classical movement and cultural knowledge acquired through experiencing dancescapes. From this standpoint, my work contributes a new insight to the intellectual study of dance. Not surprisingly, a part of this journey also resulted in a significant shift in the way I perceived and engaged in Indian classical dance performance, choreography and teaching. Ultimately, dancescapes in dialogue provides a new way of understanding how we ‘speak to the land’ because ‘the land will speak back’.

From a personal perspective, the process of collaboration and exchange of Indigenous Australian and Indian classical dancescapes has deepened my perspective of the dance medium. I have been reminded that Indigenous traditions are never lost—they are merely intermittently renewed based on sociocultural and innovative encounters of change. Ancestral knowledge and ideas remain embedded within the principles of dance practice, waiting to be ‘hunted’, explored and explicated in potentially ‘new’ ways.

Epilogue

Oṃ asato mā sadgamaya Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya Mṛtyormā'mṛtaṃ gamaya

Oṃ śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ

Lead us from the unreal to the real Lead us from darkness to light Lead us from death to
immortality, Oṃ peace, peace, peace

*Oṃ dyauḥ śāntirantarikṣaṃ śāntiḥ pṛthivī śāntirāpaḥ śāntiḥ vanaspatayaḥ
śāntirviśvedevāḥ śāntirbrahma śāntiḥ sarvaṃ śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ*

Oṃ śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ

May peace radiate there in the whole sky as well as in the vast ethereal space
everywhere. May peace reign all over this earth, in water and in all herbs, trees and
creepers. May peace flow over the whole universe. May peace be in the Supreme Being
Brahman. And may there always exist in all peace and peace alone. Oṃ peace, peace and
peace to us and all beings!

*Oṃ pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya
pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate Oṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

Oṃ! That is infinite, and this (universe) is infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite.
(Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe), It remains as the infinite alone.

Oṃ Peace! Peace! Peace!

Hari Oṃ

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